

Wellness Wednesday



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Kids While Distance Learning

Quick, easy solutions to fuel students for breakfast, lunch, snacks and dinner while distance learning at home during the coronavirus pandemic.

If your kitchen is currently doubling as the school cafeteria, we feel your pain. It's a challenge to prep and serve meals that keep distance learners energized and focused, without keeping you in the kitchen all day. We asked nutritionist experts for the best choices to feed student learners at every part of the school-at-home day.

And yes, nutrition really does make a difference.

"Our bodies get used to what you give them, so if they get nourishing foods, you'll see the best results physically, mentally and emotionally," Vicki Shanta Retelny, a registered dietician nutritionist, told HuffPost. "Food is lifestyle medicine that has the power to heal, sustain life and foster growth at every age."



A focus on whole, unprocessed foods can help your kids maintain stronger immune systems, have better moods and function at higher fitness levels, Retelny said.

Cognitive health is supported through food, movement and hydration, said Katja Rowell, a family doctor and childhood feeding specialist. "To maintain even levels of blood sugar that support the ability to pay attention, kids need food for short-term and long-term energy, time for breaks throughout the day to move their bodies and adequate water on hand all the time," she said.

"Snacks and meals should ideally offer fat, protein, carbohydrates and fiber to give that combo of quick and long energy to last until the next meal or snack," suggested Rowell, co-author of "Helping Your Child with Extreme Picky Eating."

As you fuel up your at-home learner, make sure you're considering how their food can support academic success. "It's important to incorporate protein, which helps stabilize blood sugar better over a longer period of time, and which research has shown helps children focus better on what they are learning," Retelny said. "Adding fiber like whole grains and colorful fruits and veggies can keep blood sugar more stable, as well as help cognitive abilities be more fine-tuned. And eating more plant-based foods is great for cognitive health, as well as mood and memory."

Start with a schedule

If you've had a Cheetos-for-breakfast, snow-cones-for-lunch kind of summer, it's time for a change, our experts said.

"All schools run on schedules, and home school should be the same way," registered dietitian nutritionist Amy Myrdal Miller said. "Establish and enforce a schedule for classwork as well as meals and snacks from the first day of school. Print the schedule and, if necessary, set timers or alarms to keep your student on track."

No one is going to love this at first, including you, but it's absolutely necessary, experts said. "Those first few days back to school may feel difficult, but by week two or three, their minds and bodies will anticipate meal times and break times more naturally," registered dietitian nutritionist Amy Gorin said.

How many breaks for food are enough? "Provide kids with about six daily eating opportunities — three meals and two to three snacks," registered dietitian nutritionist Amanda Frankeny said.

"Try to feed kids every two to four hours, or even more frequently for smaller children or for light breakfast eaters," Rowell said. "Be willing to check in and adjust. Going from 8 a.m. to noon may be too long between eating, for example, so you might need to add a snack at 10:30 a.m. and then eat lunch later."

And while eating is important, sleep also has a big role, Rowell added. "Regular sleep and eating times help with attention and mood. Reinstate rules about screens and bedtime, and move lights-out up by 15 minutes every few days."

Pizza for breakfast? That's OK, too.

Keep your child's natural inclinations in mind, especially first thing in the morning. "Some kids wake up hungry, but others take a little more time to develop an appetite," Rowell said. "If you're at home full time, you can more easily respond to that natural rhythm. If your child is sometimes in school and sometimes at home, try to establish the same schedule for all weekdays."

"Kids will focus and behave better if they eat breakfast," Myrdal Miller said. "It doesn't have to be fancy — a granola bar and glass of milk, or yogurt and a piece of fruit are great ways to start the day."

If nothing sounds good to them first thing, ask your kids to brainstorm foods they might enjoy for breakfast. "Some prefer to eat leftover cold pizza or stir-fry instead of breakfast foods, and that's OK," Rowell said. "Food is food. A slice of pizza with a banana and a glass of milk is a great breakfast."

Smart options for lunch

"I'm always thinking how to get veggies in meals, and that's easy to do at lunch," registered dietitian Barbara Ruhs said. "Sandwiches are a great way to offer a vegetarian option. Use hummus spread or nut butters, then top with fruit or veggies. Frozen burritos — bean or veggie — can be jazzed up with fresh salsa and guacamole. Or serve fruit salad as dessert, with your choice of apples, grapes, blueberries, avocado, mango or jicama." Not sure about jicama in fruit salad? "Try it— you'll love the crunch," Ruhs suggested.

Snack time rules

"Because you're home and the snack pantry may seem super tempting for your child, try to set ground rules about how many snacks are eaten each day, and aim to make those snacks healthy and balanced," Gorin said.

"Kids shouldn't snack on the hour, every hour," Frankeny said. "Their snacks should be able to tide them over for the following two to three hours." She added that snacks can also fill in the nutritional gaps by adding fruits, vegetables or other food groups missed during the rest of the day. "If kids didn't eat their lunch, they should snack on more filling foods, like half a peanut butter-and-apple sandwich on whole wheat bread," she suggested. "If they had a heavy lunch, top them off with fruit. Did they miss a serving of vegetables at breakfast? Try carrots and dip at snack time."

"For healthier snacking, consider putting a fruit bowl within easy reach," Myrdal Miller said. "Studies show kids will often choose the most convenient option for a snack, so if you put it where they see it, they're more likely to eat it."

"I pre-portion highly snackable treats like pretzels, popcorn and nuts so the entire bag doesn't disappear at snack time," Ruhs said. "Let your children make their own pre-portioned trail mixes in snack-sized bags." Some of her favorite combinations include wasabi peanuts, pretzels and dried fruit; corn nuts and dried fruit; and pretzels and yogurt-covered raisins.

Every 20 minutes, take a water break

Not only do you have to feed the little darlings, but you need to keep them hydrated, too. "Once they're thirsty, kids already are well on their way to being dehydrated," Frankeny said. "Water is always the best choice. Every 20 minutes, you should offer small kids 4 ounces and big kids 6 to 8 ounces."

She said that kids under age 4 require about five to six cups daily; 4- to 8-year-olds need about seven cups a day, and older kids need between nine and 12 cups daily.

If you're running into resistance over water consumption, Ruhs suggested occasional treats of "mocktails" made from 100% juice liberally diluted with water, seltzer or flavored water.

Dinner rotation

Congratulations, you made it to dinner time. Don't feel pressured to produce a test kitchen masterpiece every night, our experts said. In fact, a little predictability might be welcome by everyone concerned.

"Repetition is fine," Frankeny said. "Parents can stick with 10 staple meals and rotate through them. That kind of routine helps standardize your shopping list and still leaves some wiggle room for when you're feeling creative."



Get ahead of the game

Whatever you do, cook ahead and in batches to make things easier on school days. “I’m a big fan of prepping ahead of time and creating fun, picnic-style meals,” Gorin said. “You can hard boil eggs ahead of time, grill or roast a bunch of veggies, cook up a big batch of whole grain pasta or quinoa and pre-portion nuts. Day of, you can add fun ingredients like avocado and toasted bread. Then mix and match.”

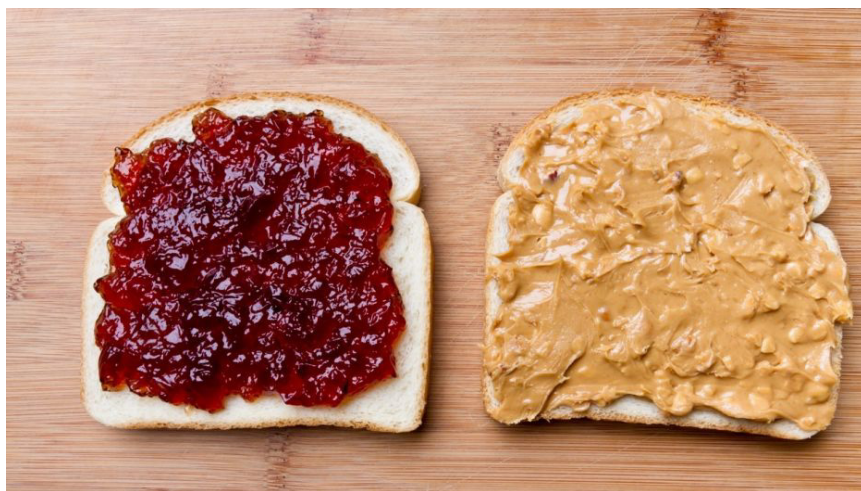
Ruhs encouraged parents to get kids involved in food prep. “The first few times it might seem like more work than it’s worth, but you can get it down to an assembly line to prepare items like sandwiches, snack bags or trail mixes.”

And please, take it easy on yourself. “Involving kids is great, but try not to battle over it,” Rowell said. “It’s OK to rely on prepared foods. A can of baked beans with tortilla chips is a great lunch. Pasta with jarred sauce and cut up cucumbers or canned fruit is a balanced dinner. Slow-cooked meats like chicken thighs or pork can be the base for tacos, or served on a bun with sauce and some peas on the side. When you have the energy and resources to cook and shop more, that’s great, but when you don’t, it’s OK too.”

Mealtimes are for connecting, not perfection

“As a parent, not everything is in your control,” Myrdal Miller said. “The pandemic has put additional pressure on everyone, especially working parents who also are trying to manage school at home. Do the best you can to provide a healthful variety of options, but if all they’ll eat is peanut butter and jelly sandwiches with chocolate milk, that’s OK. Maybe next week — or next month — you can add some variety to the menu.”

“Don’t try to make every meal and snack perfect,” Rowell said. “Parents offer the choices, and children decide what to eat from what’s been offered. The attitude and connection around meals and mealtimes matter more than how many bites of veggies they eat.”





CAPRESE CHICKEN SKILLET



419 Calories | PREP TIME: 15 mins | COOK TIME: 20 mins | TOTAL TIME: 35 mins
YIELD: 4 Servings | COURSE: Dinner, Lunch | CUISINE: Italian

INGREDIENTS

- 1/2 cup plus 1 tablespoon balsamic vinegar, divided
- 1 tablespoon plus 1 teaspoon honey, divided
- 4 small boneless, skinless chicken breasts (24 oz)
- 1 1/4 teaspoons kosher salt, divided
- 1/2 teaspoon ground black pepper, divided
- 2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil, divided
- 1 small red onion, diced (about 1 cup)
- 4 cloves garlic, minced (about 4 teaspoons)
- 4 cups sliced tomatoes: halved cherry or grape tomatoes, (2 pints) or 1/2-inch-diced peak season plum or other garden tomatoes
- 1/4 teaspoon dried thyme
- 4 ounces part-skim mozzarella pearls, (scant 1 cup) or 4 ounces block-style part-skim mozzarella cheese cut into bite-sized cubes
- 1/4 cup tightly packed fresh basil leaves, thinly sliced

This caprese chicken skillet is topped with a honey balsamic reduction and fresh basil, the perfect way to use fresh end of summer tomatoes.

TIPS:

To re-purpose leftovers you can turn them into a Caprese Chicken and Arugula Salad. Chop leftover chicken. Add to a mixing bowl with any remaining leftover tomatoes and mozzarella, and a few handfuls of arugula. Drizzle with a few splashes of olive oil and balsamic vinegar and sprinkle with salt and pepper. Toss to combine.

Nutrition Information

Serving: 1 piece chicken, 1/4 veggies and cheese, Calories: 419 kcal, Carbohydrates: 21 g, Protein: 47.5 g, Fat: 16.5 g, Saturated Fat: 5 g, Cholesterol: 141 mg, Sodium: 585 mg, Fiber: 2 g, Sugar: 7 g
Source: Skinnytaste.com



INSTRUCTIONS



How to make:

- 1.) In a small saucepan, combine $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of the balsamic vinegar and 1 tablespoon of the honey. Gently simmer over medium- low heat, stirring occasionally, until thickened and reduced by a little more than half, about 15 minutes.
- 2.) Remove from the heat and set aside.
- 3.) While the balsamic reduces, arrange the chicken on a cutting board and stretch a large sheet of plastic wrap over the top. Lightly pound the chicken breasts into an even $\frac{1}{2}$ - inch thickness. Discard the plastic, then sprinkle the chicken with $\frac{3}{4}$ teaspoon of the salt and $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon of the pepper, seasoning both sides.
- 4.) In a large, heavy- bottomed skillet, heat 1 tablespoon of the oil over medium- high heat. Once the oil is hot but not smoking, add the chicken breasts top- sides down, being careful of oil that may splatter. Let cook undisturbed for 4 minutes, or until lightly browned.
- 5.) Flip and cook an additional 3 minutes. Check for doneness. The chicken should reach 165 degrees F at the thickest part when tested with an instant- read thermometer, and when sliced, the juices should run clear. Remove to a plate and cover to keep warm.
- 6.) Without wiping out the pan, reduce the skillet heat to medium. Add the remaining tablespoon of oil, swirl to coat the pan, then add the red onion and let cook until slightly softened, about 3 minutes, scraping the browned bits off the bottom of the pan as it cooks. Add the garlic and let cook 30 seconds, just until fragrant. Add the tomatoes, thyme, and remaining 1 tablespoon balsamic vinegar, 1 teaspoon honey, $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt, and $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon pepper. Increase the heat back to medium high and cook until the tomatoes begin to soften, about 2 minutes.
- 7.) Return the chicken to the pan, nestling it into the tomatoes, and scatter the mozzarella throughout.
- 8.) Cover the pan and remove from the heat. Let stand for 1 to 2 minutes to allow the mozzarella to become soft and melty.
- 9.) Uncover, drizzle the balsamic reduction over the top, and sprinkle with the fresh basil. Serve warm.

FEATURED EXERCISE

Leg Day Will Leave You Sore If You Do These 42 Exercises



#33 Single-Leg Bridge Kicks

- 1.) Lie on your back, and place your hands on the floor for stability as you bend one leg and lift the other leg off the ground.
- 2.) Pressing your heel into the floor, lift your pelvis up, keeping your body in a stiff bridge position.
- 3.) Slowly lower your body to the floor.



For all 42 exercises use the link below

<https://www.popsugar.com/fitness/photo-gallery/44340761/image/44340815/Single-Leg-Bridge-Kicks>

Regular exercise can help you control your weight, reduce your risk of heart disease, and strengthen your bones and muscles. But if it's been awhile since you've exercised and you have health issues or concerns, it's a good idea to talk to your doctor before starting a new exercise routine.



**A river cuts
through a rock
not because of
its power but
its persistence.**



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