Math Matters!

Office of the Director, DoDDS-Europe
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Parent Newsletter Article for December 2008

Nutrition is crucial to children's health and is worth keeping in mind as we approach the holiday season and find ourselves tempted to indulge. Breakfast gets children to lunch, lunch gets them home, and dinner nourishes them overnight. Having a good dinner in the evening just isn't enough; children need to make wise food choices throughout the day, but how do we get them to eat right?

It is important to practice what you preach when it comes to nutrition. You are your children's first and most important teacher, even if your children, particularly your preteens and teens, don't always see it that way. If you start your day with a large coffee and bagel in the car, your children may believe that caffeine and sugar are clever breakfast choices and that eating on the go is normal. Here are some ways to be mindful of what you eat as a family:

Shop for groceries together. Read food labels for nutritional content, and choose foods that are low in sugar and fat.

Discuss the school lunch menu with your child in advance to help him or her make wise food choices. If your child takes a lunch from home, have him or her help pack a healthy one.

Encourage your children to cook with you, and allow them to help plan the week's meals. Slowly introduce some new wholesome foods.

Dine together as a family as often as possible. Although you may spend many hours in the car attending multiple activities, the car is not the dinner table. Try to refrain from eating there as it encourages eating fast food on the run. Dining together not only encourages healthy eating habits, it helps bond the family.

Stock your home with low-sugar foods and rid the pantry of refined sugar, i.e., processed white sugar found, for example, in many boxed snacks and cereals.

Avoid fast-food restaurants by planning your meals and snacks before leaving home. Be prepared for meal-time changes and food substitutions if necessary.

Food should not be given as a reward.

You know your child better than anyone and can provide food choices that are healthy and tasty. These examples can help guide you and your family toward healthier food choices. As a result, you and your family will achieve a dietary balance that will reward all of you in many ways throughout life.

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