

Nutritious summer foods boost kids' health

By Ashley Miller

During warm or hot weather, it's especially important to be mindful of your children's diet and fluid intake. Here are some tips that will help promote healthy habits and family fun throughout the summer.

Provide meals and snacks from the five food groups: fruits, vegetables, grains, dairy and protein. Children of different ages have different needs and require different serving sizes. ChooseMyPlate.gov is a great source to help find what portion and serving sizes fit your family's needs.

Limit processed or junk foods. Fast food and other foods that are processed, high in fat or high in sugar are OK in moderation, but it's best not have these options available at home. Offer fresh fruits and veggies or whole grains at snack times.

Choose water. Ditch the sodas, juices and other sweetened beverages and make water the beverage choice for your kids this summer. Water is the best way to stay hydrated. Make it fun by adding fresh or frozen fruit to provide a more natural sweetened flavor without the added sugars.

Involve your children. Let your children help plan family menus for the week. Let children help with the grocery shopping, especially when choosing new fruits and vegetables they want to try. Have your kids help prepare meals. They can also help set the table and clean up. Getting them excited about the whole mealtime process can help influence healthier eating habits.

Stick to a routine. Being out of school for the summer can shake things up a bit but try to avoid straying from the daily meal routine. Stay on schedule with breakfast, lunch and dinner. Offer healthy snacks between meals. Some kids tend to overeat out of boredom so sticking to a routine and offering healthy and nutritious snacks at designated times can prevent overeating.

Check out these local resources that promote healthy eating and ensure children are offered balanced meals.

- Gardeners' Market at South Park, a project of Health by Design, is now open from 4-6 p.m. every Thursday through Oct. 5.
- Yellowstone Valley Farmers' Market in downtown Billings starts on July 15 and is scheduled for 8 a.m. till noon every Saturday through Oct. 7.
- WIC (Women, Infants and Children) nutrition provides food benefits to eligible pregnant or postpartum women, infants and children up to age 5, breastfeeding support, local resource referrals and nutrition education. Call 406-247-3370.
- Free summer lunch for people under age 18 through Aug. 4, weekdays from noon till 1 p.m. in these city parks: Pioneer, Terry, Central, Amend, Castle Rock, and Hawthorne. Lunches also are served at Orchard and Lockwood elementary schools. There is no food service on July 3-5.

Exercise and nutrition go hand in hand. To ensure that your children are getting an hour of activity daily, lead by example. Join them in physical activity – a family walk or bike ride, swimming, hiking or even dancing. Limiting screen time to two hours a day or less helps promote more physical movement. Children who are active are more likely to maintain these habits into adulthood and have increased physical and mental health.

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