

Does what your kid eat make a difference?

Life without Lunchables™

Written by Jen Allbritton, CN

I remember when it was exciting that food “snapped, crackled, and popped”. Now foods have been turned blue and purple to entice the young, manipulated into shapes of all kinds, and it seems like some of these finagled foods would jump right out of their wrapper and into your mouth if you asked them to! Most all foods marketed toward tantalizing the smaller consumer are anything but nourishing. It is important to remember that food and the nutrients it contains is what builds the body and brain, prevents disease, and allows us to achieve our maximum potential. It is apparent that the majority of foods being consumed by today’s average child are not providing adequate nutrients. For example, officials are now referring to the percentage of overweight and obese American kids as an epidemic,¹ which has pushed the doors wide open for type II diabetes² and other health problems. Research has also clearly shown that poor dietary habits, such as high amounts of sugar, white bread, and commercial cereals, lower IQ.³ Furthermore, it is well established that the key to a strong, healthy immune system is optimal nutrition⁴ and, without a strong immune system, many illnesses can take root.

What about mood and behavior? In her book *The Crazy Makers*, Carol Simontacchi goes into detail about the connection between food and the current state of our minds. Did you know that the use of Prozac in children ages six to twelve rose 209% from 1995 to 1996, equating to 203,000 prescriptions in 1996? Depression, violence, cognitive disorders, social anxiety, eating disorders, and other symptoms of mental dysfunction are strongly linked to nutrition. Simontacchi noted, “When the brain malfunctions, sending bizarre messages to our mouths or limbs, we never wonder if the toxic thought is the product of a toxic lunch... The diet must supply the [building] blocks to build and maintain the brain. The diet is the one major change in our culture over the past century that has altered the physical state of our brains and, therefore, altered the state of our minds.”⁵

School cafeterias, restaurants, and fast food establishments do not have our best health in mind. It is estimated that over one-third of all meals are eaten away from home,⁵ making it very easy to consume nutrient-drained, overly processed, and additive-filled foods that damage health. The hazards of processed foods are no secret; the question is what can we do about it?

Know the Top Food Saboteurs to Avoid

Sugar: The influence of sugar intake on brain function and physical health is enormous. Excess consumption of refined sugar can contribute to hyperactivity, depression, fatigue, adversely affect school grades, compromise immunity, cause an inability to focus and concentrate, and eventually contribute to disease.^{6,7,8} Let me put it this way. When a food (even natural sugar cane) is stripped of everything valuable, it has nothing to offer. Additional processing with chemicals and heat make it essentially like a poison to the body. There are too many credible findings to ignore the dangers of refined sugar.^{6,7,8} When the occasional dessert is made, stick with raw honey, molasses, date sugar, or the herb stevia.

White Flour Products: Think of white flour as another form of white sugar. Most of the nutrients in a whole grain are stripped during the refining process. Because the “food” now has no nutrients of its own, it steals the body’s nutrient reserves in order to be metabolized through the body.⁹ This causes nutrient deficiencies. In the 1930s, doctors noticed many white bread eaters suffered from health problems caused by iron, thiamin, riboflavin, and niacin deficiencies. This led to the development of “enriched” flour, which is fortified with four nutrients but is still missing 20 others found in whole wheat.¹⁰ Manufacturers try to promote *enriched* white flour products as if they were just as nutritious as the original pre-refined version. Don’t be fooled!

Soda: Drinking soda or sugary beverages regularly is one of the habits most damaging to our health. A study published in the *Lancet* recently found that for every soft drink or sugar-sweetened beverage a child drinks every day, their obesity risk jumps 60%. No wonder obesity is a rising epidemic; 65% of adolescent girls and

74% of adolescent boys consume soft drinks daily. Furthermore, soft drinks currently constitute the leading source of added sugars in the diet,¹¹ with a whopping 7 to 12 teaspoons per can.

Damaged Fats: Rancid fats breed *free radicals* – disease-causing unstable molecules in the body.^{12,13,14} Fats can easily be damaged, particularly polyunsaturated vegetable oils, when they are heated to high temperatures, used to fry foods, or put through a process called *hydrogenation*. This process creates a man-made fabricated fat that contains harmful trans-fatty acids.^{13,15} Margarine and partially hydrogenated oil are ingredients to watch out for and avoid.

One easy way to stay clear of these health saboteurs is to limit processed foods, fast foods, and baked goods.

Look Back in History for Nutritional Advice

Beginning in the late 1800s, technology took hold of our food supply. A short time after, we started consuming more processed flours, sugars, and fake fats. Thus began the downward spiral of our foodstuffs as well as our health, which coincided with the ever-growing money clip of the food processors. In the 1930's a doctor by the name of Weston Price traveled the world to study the effects of the “modern” diet on dental health. He found many more benefits to traditional diets other than healthy teeth. The differences between people who had eaten their ancestral diet from birth and people who had feasted on sugar, white flour products, and soft drinks were mind-boggling. The traditional wholesome diet produced wide faces with jaws wide enough to accommodate all the teeth with proper spacing, few or no cavities, and wide heads to house their brains. They had happy demeanors and vibrant health. The more “civilized” diet contributed to narrow jaws with crowded teeth, cavities, and narrow foreheads. Disease set in at early ages, and mental dysfunction was common.^{5,16}

Similarities in traditional diets included nutrient-rich proteins, essential fatty acids (found in wild game, seafoods, nuts and seeds, and vegetables), unrefined carbohydrates (in the form of brightly colored vegetables, and limited grains and fruits) and micronutrients (vitamins, minerals, and enzymes). People consuming their traditional diets do not fear cholesterol, healthfully raised meat products, or saturated fat. These are needed for proper body function and growth. In fact, traditional diets contain much higher amounts of healthy fats, particularly for children, than current government recommendations.^{5,13} Every child's nutrient needs will be different and they will change over time; however, general nutrient percentages suggestions include 25% to 35% protein, 30% to 40% fat (the younger and more active need even more), and 35% to 40% complex carbohydrates. Adjust individual needs by listening to signs from the body. For example, a lack of protein can contribute to sugar cravings and fatigue,¹² and good-quality oils can reduce the cravings for less healthy fatty foods.⁵

In general, start the day with a healthy protein, such as eggs or a protein smoothie. Missing breakfast negatively affects the performance of certain kinds of mental tasks in children. This impact may be due to unstable blood sugar levels,¹⁷ which is worsened by sugar and white flour, and improved by protein. Try to incorporate some kind of vegetable salad somewhere in the day and don't be shy with healthy protein and fat, such as those found in nuts, avocados, coconut, organic eggs and poultry, grass-fed beef, wild fish, and olive oil. Also, try to pack school lunches with healthy foods to help sustain your child's body and mind.

8 quick tips on feeding children the healthy way

Having kids means life moves FAST! Try these simple steps to make healthy eating practical in a child-filled life.

1. **Think simple.** The simplest foods, meaning foods that have endured the least amount of heating, processing, or finagling, are the healthiest. For example, choose an apple over apple pie, or homemade grain cereal over a processed boxed version. This same concept goes for meals as well. Mealtime does not have to be a drawn-out process of gourmet ingredients and elaborate setups to be healthy; think simple foods and simple meals for maximum nourishment.

2. **Always have the healthy stuff on hand** and avoid purchasing the junk. In other words, don't buy, so you won't try! The foods most available will be the ones consumed. If there is a choice between potato chips and celery with peanut butter as a snack, the chips will most likely be gobbled up before you can say "Beauty and the Beast." The best fast foods are the ones you make yourself; this way you know what goes into them. Keep these convenient foods on hand by making big batches and storing them in small quantities in the freezer.
3. **Be an example.** Parents are walking teachers all day, every day. I often see parents that are concerned about getting the healthy foods into their kids' bodies, yet they do not show themselves the same courtesies. Demonstrating to children that choosing to be responsible for our own health is an invaluable lifelong lesson.
4. **Involve the kids.** Make food personal by involving kids in mealtime preparations. Just like earning money to pay for that first car you valued just a bit more, feeling, tasting, and experiencing the activity of preparing nourishing meals gives a different perspective to children about what they are putting in their mouths. Take it a step further and visit an organic farm and see firsthand all the steps that go into growing food.
5. **Learn why you are feeding or shying away from certain foods** and teach kids in an understandable way. Some example explanations are "we don't eat white bread because it soaks up the vitamins in our bodies so we get sick more often" or "we eat fish because it feeds the brain and makes us smart." A few resources to consider include *The Crazy Makers* by Carol Simontacchi and *The New Whole Foods Encyclopedia* by Rebecca Wood.
6. **Make mealtime a family event.** Eating together is good! A terrific study reported in the *Archives of Family Medicine* found that kids who regularly sit down with their families for an evening meal eat more vegetables and get more nutrients than those who do not. Those family mealtime youngsters are less likely to eat fried food, hydrogenated fat, and drink soda. They also tend to make healthier food choices overall.¹⁸ Make a goal of serving at least one family meal per day.
7. **Plan.** Not only is it a good idea to have your meals planned out and your ingredients well stocked, but also being prepared for the mid-day munchies and the unexpected is paramount when it comes to kids and our hectic lives. Thinking ahead will help prevent the fast food drive-thru emergencies and curb appetites healthfully until a bigger meal can be served at home. Remember, preparation is half the battle. Once you get a routine going with meal and snack planning and preparation, it becomes second nature and will eventually take less time and energy.
8. **Find Replacements.** When your little one starts asking for the next "magical" food being advertised, make or find pre-made versions that are just as fun and tasty but are made with more nourishing ingredients. Use some of the ideas below to help.

Food	Healthy Replacement Choices
Cereal/Breakfast (instead of commercial boxed cereals, bars, and processed baked goods)	Homemade oatmeal; Egg burrito or cooked eggs on buttered whole grain toast; Homemade waffle* (thawed from frozen batch) with fruit with maple syrup blended in blender; Fruit smoothie*; Yogurt with fruit and a dash of maple syrup sprinkled with almonds;
Snacks (instead of chips, candy bars, and commercial cookies)	Homemade trail mix with lots of healthy nuts, seeds, dried fruits and a dash of chocolate chips mixed in; Hard boiled egg; Homemade cookies*, muffins*, waffles, or pancakes; Homemade popcorn; Fresh fruit; Apple, carrot, or celery with peanut or almond butter; Whole grain crackers with organic cheese; Homemade frozen fruit pops*;

	Homemade food bar* or store-bought bar such as ReBar by <i>Healthco</i> with fruits and veggies, Organic Sesame Bars by <i>Oskri</i> , or <i>Govinda's</i> Bliss bars made with nuts, seeds, and honey; <i>Stretch Island</i> Fruit Leathers (regular or organic); Dried fruit in bulk, like apples, mango or bananas; <i>Sheltons</i> chicken, turkey & beef jerky;
Soda (instead of Coke™ and Kool-Aid™)	Homemade fruit/tea spritzers and coolers*; Homestyle Gingerale* or Lemonade*
Fast food/Lunch (instead of Lunchables™, McDonalds™, and frozen dinners)	Leftovers from dinner; Portion of big batch of salad*; Pita pockets filled with sprouts, turkey or ham, cheese, and favorite dressing; Sandwiches on whole grain bread (e.g. sprouted Ezekiel or Alvarado bread), such as turkey with pesto and spinach, cheese with mustard and veggies, roast beef with green peppers and mayo, or nut butter (e.g. peanut, almond, cashew) and sliced banana, chopped pitted dates, sliced apples, grated carrots or wheat germ and honey – use your imagination. Fill a collapsible cooler-like lunch pail with your main food and some snack ideas from above.

Our hurry-hurry, rush-rush mentality often leads to overlooking the basic needs we have in life – nourishing, home-cooked meals, relaxation, time to just breathe, etc. Decide to invest in health - you and your family are worth it! Our “modern” times food industry would like us to believe that we can sustain ourselves with processed fast foods day in and day out. They are WRONG! Feeding kids simply-prepared, nourishing, but tasty whole food meals instead of fake, highly processed foods is easier and less time- consuming than one might think. Once some foundational principles and practices become habit, they begin to be part of your day and will not take as much effort and thought.

*These recipes can be found on the following page.

References available upon request.

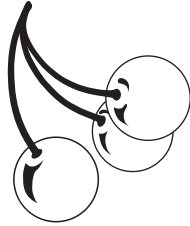
Food Ideas for Kids

Tangy Cherry Slaw

Make a big batch and divide into lunch-size portions.

Dressing

¼ cup date sugar
½ teaspoon dry mustard
½ teaspoon celery seed
dash salt
1/3 cup olive oil
¼ cup lime juice
2-3 tablespoon raw, unpasteurized honey (depends on how sweet you want it)



Salad

1 bag (16 oz) coleslaw mixture (or shred your own green and red cabbages)
1 ½ cup shredded carrots
½ to ¾ cup dried tart cherries
½ cup chopped green onions

For dressing, combine sugar, dry mustard, celery seed and salt in a small mixing bowl and mix well. Whisk in vegetable oil, lime juice and honey until well blended and sugar is dissolved. Combine salad ingredients in a large mixing bowl. Pour dressing over coleslaw mixture; mix until well combined. Refrigerate 30 minutes before serving.

Fruit Smoothie

Mix all ingredients in a blender until smooth:

1 ½ cups milk or milk alternative (almond*, coconut** or other milk alternative)
½ to 1 banana, frozen
½ cup frozen berries (any kind)
1 tsp. to 1 Tbs. green powder (powder with one or more nutrient-rich green foods)
1 or more of the nutritional additions listed below.

Optional Nutritional Additions: protein powder (whey, egg, rice, etc.), a few almonds, pumpkin seeds, or sunflower seeds, yogurt, kefir, nut butter, flaxseed meal, or coconut oil/butter

*Almond milk: To activate almonds, soak overnight, pour off water. Use 1 part soaked almonds, 4 parts water and blend. Pour through strainer if you want it smoother.

**Coconut or Coconut Cashew Milk: Take dried coconut and cashews, soak ¼ cup of each (or ½ cup coconut) with 1 quart of water in the frig overnight, blend, then strain.

Note: You can also purchase *Pacific Almond* milk, or *Blue Diamond*, *Natural Forest*, or *Thai Kitchen* coconut milk

Soda Alternatives

Fresh Fruit Spritzers: ½ cup fresh 100% fruit juice, ½ cup *Blue Sky All Natural True Seltzer Sparkling Water*. You can also use 1 tsp. of frozen juice concentrate in eight ounces of sparkling water. Be adventurous and try different flavors from *Cascadian Farms* like Peach-Mango or Strawberry-Guava. You get an added bonus since these concentrates are all organic!

Homestyle Gingerale: 1 cup *Blue Sky All Natural True Seltzer Sparkling Water*, a lot of freshly grated ginger and 1 tbsp pure maple syrup. Mix all ingredients together in a glass and let it sit for about a ½ hour. Play around with the amounts and add cinnamon, nutmeg and any other spices you like.

Herb Tea-Juice Coolers: Make a strong batch of herbal tea (like Raspberry Herbal Medley by *Long Life*) in the refrigerator and mix with equal parts of any fruit juice that complements the flavor of the tea (like Cranberry Raspberry Juice Cocktail by *Cascadian Farms*).

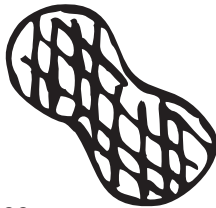
Lemonade: Juice of 3 to 4 lemons (5 to 6 oz.), 1 quart of water, and ½ tsp. clear liquid *stevia extract*. Mix all ingredients together and enjoy! Or try our natural lemonades by *Santa Cruz Organics* or *Mountain Sun*

Cherry Lime Cooler: 2 ½ cups water, 1/8 tsp. clear liquid *stevia extract*, 3 Tbs. fresh lime juice, 2 cups sugar-free cherry juice blend. Blend all ingredients and place in the frig.



Whole Food Bars

- 2 cups nut butter (peanut and/or almond works well)
- 1 cup honey (option: sub ½ brown rice syrup for ½ honey)
- 1 cup each:
 - Chopped almonds
 - Flaxseed meal
 - Shredded coconut
 - Sunflower seeds
 - Oats
 - Peanuts or any nut of your choice
 - Carob chips or malt sweetened chocolate chips



Mix ingredients together. It will get very stiff. Spread in 9×13 pan. Grease pan unless it is glass. Bake at 350 degrees for 35 minutes.

Sweet Crunch Muffins

- 1 cup rolled oats
- 1 cup buttermilk (substitute 1 Tbs. lemon juice with 1 cup 1 Tbs. milk)
- ½ cup Rapadura (unfiltered evaporated cane juice)
- ½ cup oil (preferably olive or melted coconut oil/butter)
- 1 egg and 1 egg white
- 1 cup whole wheat flour
- 2 tsp. baking powder
- ½ tsp. baking soda
- ½ cup pitted dates, chopped
- ½ cup chopped pecans



In a large bowl, mix oats, buttermilk, sugar, oil and egg. In another bowl, mix flour, baking powder, baking soda, dates, and pecans. Add flour mixture to buttermilk mixture; stir just until moistened. Equally fill 12 to 15 oiled or paper-lined muffin tins with batter. Bake in 375 oven until well browned, 20 to 25 minutes. Cool in pans for 5 minutes. Invert to remove muffins.

Buttermilk Waffles

- 2 cups flour (try half whole wheat pastry & half buckwheat)
- 1 ½ tsps. baking powder
- ¼ tsp. baking soda
- ½ tsp. sea salt
- 2 egg yolks
- 6 to 9 drops clear stevia liquid concentrate or 15 dark concentrate
- 1 2/3 cups buttermilk, or kefir
- 6 Tbs. melted butter
- 2 egg whites

Preheat a standard-sized waffle iron. In a large mixing bowl, sift together the flour, baking powder, baking soda, and salt. In a medium-sized bowl, beat the egg yolks and stevia together well. Add the buttermilk and butter, and continue to beat until well combined. Add the liquid mixture to the dry ingredients and mix together with a few swift strokes. Do not overmix. Using an electric mixer, beat the egg whites until stiff, then fold them into the batter. When the iron is ready, add enough batter to cover about two-thirds of the grill's surface and close the lid. Cook about 4 minutes, or until steam stops escaping from the sides of the iron. Lift up the cover and remove the waffle. Repeat with the remaining batter. Top with blended fruit. Found in *The Stevia Cookbook* by Raw Sahelian and Donna Gates.

A Good Cookie

- 1/3 cup butter
- 2/3 cup Rapadura (evaporated cane juice sugar)
- 1/8 cup blackstrap molasses
- 1 beaten egg
- 1 ½ tsp vanilla
- ½ tsp salt
- ¾ tsp baking powder
- 1 cup whole wheat and/or spelt flour
- ½ cup flax meal
- ¾ cup walnuts, smashed or chopped
- ½ cup oats or multi-grain cereal
- ½ cup chocolate chips
- water (add a little if the batter's too dry)

Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Blend butter, Rapadura, and molasses well. Add beaten egg, vanilla, and salt. Stir in flour, baking powder, wheat germ, and grains. Add walnuts and chips. Use a tablespoon to portion them out on two lightly-oiled cookie sheets, flatten them a bit, and bake for 10 to 12 minutes. Makes 2 dozen. When doing a double batch, use shredded coconut for the second ½ cup of flax meal.

Coconut Pineapple Pops

- 1 can coconut milk (*Thai Kitchen* or *Nature Forest*)
- 3 bananas
- 1 13oz can crushed pineapple (Natural Value is a good brand)
- ½ cup dried coconut (optional if you want that texture to your pops)
- Optional sweetener like stevia or Lo Han (*Slim Sweet* or *Sweet and Slender*)
- Blend all the ingredients in a blender and pour into popsicle containers and freeze



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