

Ideas for Packing a Healthy School Lunch

Backpack Basics

Why Preschool needs to get its "pre-" back

Team Spotlight



August 2011

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Back to School!

Ideas for Packing a Healthy School Lunch

Healthy eating starts at home, and modeling good food choices for your children is the best way to raise a healthy eater. But, even if your child eats healthy at home, how do you ensure he makes good choices when he goes to school? More than any other meal, kids have a lot of control over what they eat for lunch at school. Packing a lunch full of healthy foods that he enjoys is the best way to provide him with balanced nutrition. And, packing his lunchbox creatively increases the chances he'll eat those foods! Here are some tips for creating a meal that won't get thrown away:

- 1) Keep it simple. Don't try to be fancy or gourmet, since most likely your child prefers simple foods. 2) Include foods that are easy to open and eat. They will be much more likely to eat foods that can be accessed quickly. 3) Kids enjoy things that are small, like them. Cube rotisserie chicken, cheese, veggies, or melon. Or buy items in miniature form (rolls, bagels, crackers). 4) Don't forget about dips. Kids love to dip foods, so provide that in their lunch. Consider salsa of all kinds (mango, pineapple, tomato), hummus, guacamole, nut spreads (if allowed), and

- salad dressings. 5) Be creative. Make traditional items more exciting using craft supplies, cookie cutters, cloth napkins, flowers, a note from you, or stickers. 6) Think of ways to get protein into the lunch instead of just carbohydrates. Add a cheese stick, a small cup of tuna salad with pickles, or sliced meat and veggies in a pita pocket. 7) Ask your child to help. If you bring her to the grocery store, she can help you plan the lunches and will be more likely to eat them. 8) Prepare on Sundays. Wash and divide veggies into snack size containers at all once, so that you have one less thing to do each morning. 9) Smoothies or soups in a thermos are a fun way for kids to drink their lunch. 10) Always have a fast, easy lunch ready for Friday mornings when you've run out of food ideas. For example, cook a frozen pizza on Friday mornings and drop a slice into a thermos. Add a bag of sliced green and red peppers for munching, and your child has a fun Friday lunch.

Backpack Basics

The school year is about to start and you've probably already began purchasing school supplies for your children. One of the most important, and fun, tools to shop for is a backpack. Backpacks come in all sorts of colors and fabrics, but when purchasing a backpack it is essential to take into account what type of backpack is the most comfortable and supportive fit for your child.

Strenuous exercise or sports, poor posture, and sitting for long periods of time are all common causes of back pain in children. However, some children experience backaches due to the heavy load they carry in their backpacks. Children frequently carry multiple textbooks, school supplies, and personal items, such as cell phones, in their backpacks all day. Combined with improper use or certain styles of backpacks, this can cause pain and even injury. It is recommended that children carry no more than 10-15% of their body weight in their backpacks. To calculate the maximum allowed weight for your child's backpack use the following formulas:

(Child's Weight) x .10 = (10% of Body Weight)

(Child's Weight) x .15 = (15% of Body Weight)

The back is composed of 33 bones (vertebrae) that are separated by disks that work like shock absorbers. When too much weight is placed on the shoulders it can cause the child to lean forward at the hips or arch the lower back to compensate for the heavy pack that is pulling the child backward. This can cause the spine to compress unnaturally, and ultimately cause the child to develop neck, shoulder, and back pain. Additionally, children who incorrectly place their pack over one shoulder will subsequently lean to one side, which can lead to upper back pain or strained a strained neck and shoulders.

American Academy of Pediatrics guidelines to consider when purchasing your child's backpack this fall:

- Lightweight materials, fabrics such as canvas are lighter than leather
• Two, wide, padded shoulder straps, as opposed to thin straps that dig into shoulders
• Padded back for comfort and protection from objects inside
• Waist belt to distribute weight across the body
• Multiple compartments to distribute weight more evenly

Tips to prevent injuries:

- Lighten the load—there is no need for children to carry excess items. Check the weight of your child's backpack on the bathroom scale if you are unsure if it exceeds the maximum 10-15% of body weight.
• Purchase paperback books or books on CD-ROM when possible, which are lighter than hardcover alternatives.
• Children should bring home only the books that are necessary for homework and studying that night.
• Utilize all compartments of the backpack. Heavy items, such as textbooks, should be kept at the center of the back.
• Encourage your child to use his or her locker and desk throughout the day as opposed to carrying the entire day's necessary books and materials.
• Use both shoulder straps, and tighten straps enough to make sure the backpack sits at the middle of the back and close to the body.
• Pick up the backpack the right way; bend at the knees and grab the backpack with both hands.

## Why Preschool needs to get its “pre-” back

We all want to be good parents.

There may be a few exceptions to that statement, but the exceptions really prove the rule—we all love kids and want the best for them. Sometimes, however, these affections, though well-intended, can be misguided.

One of the areas where this seems to be occurring is the “education” of our younger ones. There is a current trend (and growing) to try to give our children a head start on their academic training by teaching infants and toddlers skills and information previously acquired at a later age. “Your Baby Can Read”, “Teach Your Baby Spanish”, “Alphabet Flash Cards”, and “IQ Baby” and their various products—there is an ever growing list of “opportunities” available to today’s parents.

Like never before, our babies’ cognitive development has become a task requiring our special attention. At least, that is what we are being told. Today’s parents are led to believe that resisting this cultural encouragement would be opening the door to their deepest fear (i.e. their child being left behind).

### Does it work?

One question that needs to be asked is, are young children capable of learning these things at this age, thus accelerating their brain’s capabilities? The answer to that is both yes and no. “Yes” in the sense that it is true that many young children can learn this information and perform these tasks earlier ages than typical. It can be quite impressive watching a very young child recite facts and perform mental skills that are typical of children years older.

But answering the question is more complex than that. If the question is asked in a slightly different way, i.e. whether the early acquisition of these skills is a predictor of later academic success, the answer seems to be “no”. For more on this topic, you are encouraged to read the book *Einstein Never Used Flash Cards* by Hirsh-Pasek and Golinkoff, which really should be required reading for parents of young children.

Another related question is, does highest academic ability correlate with long-term professional success? The answer to this is also “no”, and this is the premise behind the concept of “Emotional Intelligence” and it being a much stronger predictor of success than one’s I.Q.

### Just because they can doesn’t mean they should

Intellectual development doesn’t occur in a vacuum, but is rather intimately related to our emotional and psychological development as well. Pediatricians place great emphasis on normal childhood development, and for young children, play is the primary way children learn. Children learn to reason, to count, to communicate, to problem solve (and many other intellectual skills) all in the context of play. Ignoring a child’s appropriate developmental stage in order to get a “head start” on things to come can cause problems with a child’s overall well-being. This process has been described as “adultification” of our children.

### Potential Problems

There are a variety of issues that may result from this “accelerated curriculum”. Instructing young children in this manner has the potential to teach children that memorizing information is what is important as opposed to understanding and experiencing.

### Third Thursdays Parent Focus Groups

Middleton Pediatrics would like to invite you to Third Thursdays Parent Focus Groups. These focus groups will be held every 3rd Thursday for three consecutive months, and will provide a time for parents to ask questions and have an open discussion about a variety of topics related to pediatric health with our Nurse Practitioner, Christine May. This is an opportunity for parents to get their questions answered and seek advice, as well as network and find support within our community.

For more information, please visit [www.middletonpediatrics.com/third-thursdays-focus-groups](http://www.middletonpediatrics.com/third-thursdays-focus-groups), or ask our Family Care Coordinator, Kelli.

#### Focus Group 1: Food Allergies and Intolerances

Meeting Time: 12:15PM-1:00PM

#### Focus Group 2: Asthma

Meeting Time: 1:00PM-1:45PM

Session 1: September 15

Session 2: October 20

Session 3: November 17

Children are being given information long before the context ever arises in their minds, thus minds are full of information without having an appropriate place to put it.

Additionally, learning becomes less about satisfying a curiosity and more about pleasing the “teacher/parent”. The authors of *Einstein Never Used Flash Cards* describes this as “learning for love instead of loving to learn”. This may produce an abundance of knowledge, but struggles in one’s capacity to think, to be creative, and to apply learned information to situations of life. Then we may be left with kids who are great at taking test, but lack the “emotional intelligence” to live life—a sentiment frequently voiced by educators and employer’s about today’s high-achieving youth.

Perhaps the most concerning and unwanted consequence of this process is increased anxiety. Childhood anxiety seems to be at an all-time high. It is almost as if our children can feel the weight of our academic expectations. Is it possible that by trying to impatiently shortcut the normal developmental process we may be producing anxiety in our kids? Research seems to say so. In his book *Under Pressure*, author Carl Honore recounts a study that looks at children in Philadelphia and found that by ages 7-8, there was no discernible gap between the performance of children who spend their preschool years in rigidly academic settings vs. those in more play-based preschools. “The only difference was that the hothoused kids tended to be more anxious and less creative.”

### What to do

So, what should we as parents do to “cultivate the minds” of our young children? What is the most age-appropriate? It is really quite simple. Spend time with them “where they are”. Feed their fascinations; and when they are satisfied, stop force-feeding. When choosing a preschool, go and observe. Is there a heavy emphasis on play? Do the teachers love on and interact with the children on an individual basis? Do the children have a sense of joy? Childhood is such an important time developmentally, and understanding the uniqueness of this stage will serve the children well, both in the short-term and long-term.

So feel the freedom to put away the flash cards. What your child’s mind needs is play and you.

## Team Spotlight: Dr. Middleton



Hometown: Macon, GA

Children: Connor (13), Luke (11), Drew (8), and Ansley Allen (3)

Favorite Book: A Land Remembered

Favorite Restaurant: The kitchen at our house (Though Del Frisco’s is pretty good too)

Favorite Sweet: Can’t beat chocolate chip cookies

Favorite Bands: Jimmy Buffett, Barenaked Ladies, Billy Joel, Zac Brown Band

Favorite Holiday: Christmas (such a fun family time)

Hobbies: sports (playing, watching, reading), fishing, reading

What made you want to become a pediatrician? I enjoy the emphasis on family, as well as educating/teaching. Also, kids are just fun.

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