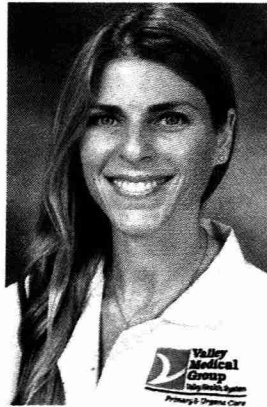


Back to school lunches: A key part of your child's health and education

Getting the kids ready to go back to school often involves shopping for school supplies and new clothes and attempting to get everyone back into a normal sleep routine.

There's another key back-to-school routine that Dr. Sherry Sakowitz-Sukkar wants you to be thinking about. "Ensuring that your kids are prepared to tackle the new school year is sending them to school with a healthy lunch," according



Dr. Sherry Sakowitz-Sukkar

to Dr. Sakowitz-Sukkar, pediatric wellness and weight management, Valley Medical Group. "And, fortunately, packing a healthy lunch is easier and faster than you might think!"

There are many benefits to packing a healthy lunch including:

- Helping your child to remain alert, energized and focused in class.
- Ensuring that your child likes the food in his/her lunchbox and is therefore more likely to eat it.
- Teaching your child about portion control and about eating a balanced diet.
- Knowing what your child is and isn't eating so you can ensure that he/she has balanced meals throughout the day.
- Learning healthy eating habits at an early age can help with healthy food choices later in life.

Kids.gov has the following tips for packing a healthy lunch:

Switch white bread for whole grain. If sandwiches are a staple in your child's lunch, the easiest way to make a change is to substitute whole grain bread for white. There are many varieties out there to please even the pickiest eater. You can also substitute flour tortillas with whole wheat ones and white pita with whole grain. Fill them with lean, unprocessed proteins like turkey slices or low-fat cheese. If your child prefers

warm food in a thermos, you can fill it with brown rice, whole grain pasta, or even steel-cut oatmeal.

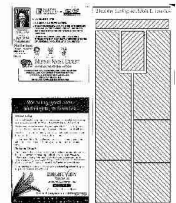
Pack a rainbow. Fruits and vegetables are great sources of nutrition. Make fruits and vegetables more interesting. Pack green and purple grapes or colorful berries, dried apricots, mangos, cut red and orange peppers into strips and send them with a fun dipping sauce like hummus. You can even make your own dipping sauce by adding mashed up fruits to plain Greek yogurt! If you send oranges, make sure that they are already peeled and sliced. The prettier the presentation, the higher the chances are your child will reach for it.

Water, water, water. Juice may seem harmless, especially since the labels read things like "packed with fruit." But juice adds a lot of unnecessary sugar and calories to your child's diet. Consider rethinking what they drink and send a bottle of water instead of a juice box. Not only does drinking water eliminate extra sugar from their diet, but it also keeps children from getting dehydrated throughout the day.

Low-fat milk is also a good idea since it provides calcium and protein.

Think about temperature. Would you eat warm yogurt or cold rice? The temperature inside your child's lunchbox is just as important as what is inside. Keep hot foods warm by sending them in a thermos. (It helps if you first fill it with boiling water for two minutes to retain some heat.) Keep cold items like cheese or hardboiled eggs cool by using ice packs. You can also use a refillable water bottle filled with ice cubes to keep things fresh, plus it will provide drinking water at the same time!

Plan ahead. Making a healthy lunch does take some thought, but the morning rush, when everyone's trying to get



out the door, isn't the best time to get creative. Try to make a routine of packing some items the night before. Cutting up fruit, pre-making sandwiches and boiling whole grain pasta are all time-saving steps. Another good habit is to make weekly shopping lists, so you're not stuck searching the cupboard for last-minute – and unhealthy – options.

Valley's Center for Pediatric Wellness and Weight Management provides a comprehensive program of medical and behavioral health care, nutrition services, and family support to help overweight and obese children and teenagers lose weight, improve their health, and reduce their risk of developing

chronic illnesses.

The center is one of several hospital-based programs of its kind in the New York-New Jersey metropolitan area. In addition to Dr. Sakowitz-Sukkar, who is board-certified in both pediatrics and obesity medicine, the program's staff includes a pediatric dietitian/nutrition staff, social worker, and support staff. Exercise coaches on staff at affiliated facilities are also a part of the program.

To make an appointment for your child to speak with a specialist at **Valley Medical Group's Center for Pediatric Wellness and Weight Management**, call **(201) 391-0846**.