

Healthy Food Choices

For Back-to-School Lunches

As the carefree days of summer change into the routine of school and sports schedules, Moms have a daily opportunity to help their children be their best. "As parents, we can help our children fuel their bodies with healthy foods so they can function better – think better, play better and perform better," noted Dr. James Proodian, health educator who empowers youth through his "Trim Kids" and "Performance Nutrition" Programs. "Research shows that behavioral and performance in school correlate to a number of factors which include nutritional habits and food selection," added Dr. Proodian.

Recently, the Competitive Girls Gymnastics Team at Head Over Heels Gymnastics in Middletown completed the four-week Performance Nutrition Program. Comprised of athletes ages 7-16, this team became a 2006 United State Association of Independent Gymnastics Clubs (USAIGC) National Champion in June. "These girls work out 16 hours per week," noted Head Over Heels Coach Ronanne DeRosa. "They wanted to learn how to get an athletic edge over the competition by making better food choices, and Dr. Proodian helped both mothers and daughters understand how their food choices can affect their bodies and their performance."

Head Over Heels has been instructing gymnastics in Monmouth & Middlesex counties for over 22 years. Gymnastics is an excellent source of fitness, body awareness, and motivation for children of all ages. The Performance Nutrition Program presented another perspective on self-motivation through healthy foods.

During the one-hour sessions, these young athletes learned the importance of eating the right kinds of protein, carbohydrates, fat, vitamins and minerals, and water. They also learned how to food shop, read labels and make proper choices for their school lunch and snacks.

Helping Children Eat Healthy Foods at School

Among the many insights shared, Dr. Proodian stressed, "Don't leave your children's nutritional habits to school systems, vending machines or chance." Moms can gain control by following these guidelines:

- Use plastic containers as an organizational tool. Sealed containers keep foods fresh for days which allows you to prepare on Sunday for the coming week. There is no rule that says a school lunch must be prepared the night before. Use Sunday as a day to plan, prepare and organize just like an athlete needs to prepare for the game or a student for a test...parents need to prepare children for healthy eating.

- Portion control. Your children may weigh 50-100 lbs. but sometimes eat as much as their 200 lbs. father! If you provide healthy chips as a crunchy snack, make sure you count out the quantity. Ten chips in a bag is adequate. An alternative to chips is nuts; count out 10 almonds or walnuts. Unroasted and unsalted are best.

- Think "outside of the lunch box." Bend the rules of what is considered to be a typical school lunch – sandwich, chips, and a piece of fruit. Instead, give your child a healthy lunch made from dinner leftovers the night before. If you had chicken or steak, slice it and place on top of field greens. Instead of a piece of fruit, prepare a tasty fruit salad. Provide a dipping sauce for celery and carrots.

- Avoid canned foods. It's best to eat foods that naturally rot or spoil. Just eat them before they do. The less prepared it is the better, and it is often less expensive. Processed and packaged foods are usually higher in cost and lower in nutritional value than those you prepare yourself.

- Be careful of both the sugar and salt content in snack foods. Just by reading the label you can quickly discover the amount. If sugar is

among the top two ingredients, avoid it. Sugar can also be disguised as "high fructose corn syrup and sucrose" among other names.

"Sugar is the leading cause of obesity in children and adults," noted Dr. Proodian. On average, individuals consume 150 lbs. per year. And, more alarming is how one can of soda a day can add 15 lbs. per year in weight gain.

The A-F Test

Moms can also empower their children to make healthy food choices by using the "A-F Test." Simply allow your child to grade foods on an A-F grading system. As part of the food test, let your child help with the shopping and food preparation. The final step is the taste test. "A child doesn't have to like all new foods. If your son gives broccoli a "D or F", you know this isn't a food that he will eat at this

time. Simply try another food. The goal is getting your child to try new foods and enjoy the ones that he or she likes.

The 3 Bite Rule

Let's talk desserts! Use the "three-bite rule" for foods we know are fattening or not healthy. The three-bite rule empowers a child to enjoy an occasional dessert, but only allows three bites. This satisfies the craving for something sweet while keeping wasted calories to a minimum. This is an effective rule for adults as well.

The bottom line is that kids will be kids; they will eat cookies and pizza. The goal for Moms is to put the majority of the foods your children are consuming under your control during breakfast, lunch and dinner. This is especially true for athletes who need to compete at a national level like the young ladies at Head Over Heels.

All of Dr. Proodian's health articles can be found at www.NaturalHealthcareCenter.com. To learn more about the Trim Kids & Performance Nutrition programs, call Dr. Proodian at 732-222-2219

– Health Literacy is the Key to Longevity.



Health Educator Dr. James Proodian helped the Head Over Heels Girls Gymnastics Team from Middletown learn how to choose the "right" foods that can improve their speed, flexibility and strength.