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**In this issue of *To Your Health*:**

- [Healthy Back-to-School Lunches](#)
- [Time-Saving Tips to Improve Health](#)
- [Cholesterol and Kids: Wait, Don't Medicate](#)

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## Healthy Back-to-School Lunches



The majority of entrees served on school campuses include pizza, Sloppy Joes, cheeseburgers, spaghetti, hot dogs and corn dogs. It's rare that you will see anything made with fish and chicken, unless it's fish sticks and chicken nuggets, which contain processed meat that is breaded and deep fried. It's time to accept the fact that raising healthier children means they won't be eating school lunches, but instead will need to be provided lunch from home. Here are some suggestions for how even the busiest parents can do it.

**The Beverage:** The American Academy of Pediatrics says that juice consumption is contributing to cavities and gastrointestinal issues for children, while milk has proven to be a common food allergen. Your best option is to encourage your child to drink water. This can be done by providing water for them in their lunch box using a stainless-steel thermos or by placing ice cubes in their thermos in the morning.

**The Entree:** Great sources of protein that can be put in a small lunch container are cubes of baked chicken, turkey or fish. This does not include processed meat that you buy at your grocery store, but should be prepared at home and cut into bite-size pieces. Remember that you can freeze these in small portions and use them randomly over the course of several weeks.

Commonly found in the packed lunch is a sandwich; the problem is that bad choices can be made here as well. White bread bought at the store contains bleached flour. And don't be fooled by the word "enriched," as adding back a portion of the vitamins removed during the bleaching process doesn't undo the damage.

Better sandwich choices include whole-wheat bread with a lot of grains, and almond butter instead of

peanut butter. And be creative. Try to put vegetables into a sandwich as much as possible. If your children "don't like vegetables," stick with it. Sometimes it's just a phase, and the more exposure they get (and choices), the greater the chance they'll surprise you.

**The Sides:** Most children don't consider lunch complete unless there are chips and cookies. These must be avoided at all cost; chips and cookies are an occasional treat, not a lunch staple. The side dishes for your children should be tasty cut vegetables, keeping in mind that greener is better.

Fruit is also a great side dish, but while it is healthy, it is also a source of sugar and not as rich in vitamins and minerals as vegetables. Try to serve fruit just once for every five servings of vegetables. Remember that it should be fresh, organically grown fruit, not processed "substitutes." Fruit roll-ups are not fruit.

No one knows better than your own child what they're going to eat, so let them help you prepare their lunches. Remember that if they like what they're eating, they will bring home an empty lunch box. The best way to accomplish this is to ensure that they have a variety of healthy choices. Talk to your doctor for more great ideas on how to give your children healthy lunches this school year - and all year round.

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## **Time-Saving Tips to Improve Health**

We live in a busy world and for most of us, it's only getting busier. Before you drop to the ground in frustration, take these tips to heart and see how quickly your health and well-being improve:



1. **DON'T WAIT FOR A RAINY DAY** Procrastination does little good for your mind, body or soul, although at any given time, the procrastinator thinks they're doing themselves a service by putting something off until "later." The problem is that while you may not be doing it (yet), you're thinking about it and worrying about it not being done, or doing it halfway and the ending up with even more to do. The message is simple: Save time later by doing it now.
2. **YOUR HOME IS YOUR GYM** For many people, rushing to the gym at 5:00 in the morning or 9:00 at night doesn't work, especially in the long term. Add to that the daily rigors of work, family and everything else, and you can see why so many people quit working out after an encouraging start. The time-saving solution is to invest in a few simple pieces of equipment so when you don't have time to go to the gym, the gym can come to you!
3. **A LITTLE ORGANIZATION...** Lack of organization may be the most time-consuming scenario of all. Consider how much of your life is spent looking for things you put "away" without putting them in the right place. Taking the time to organize your life - from your bills to your garage to your kitchen cabinets to your daily agenda - will save you more time than you can imagine, and you'll feel great doing it.

4. **COOK NOW, EAT LATER** We live in a society that rewards poor preparation, particularly when it comes to food. If you're trying to avoid fast food, microwavable entrees and the like, you'll often end up scrambling to prepare meals after work or while trying to get the kids off to school. Save time (and sanity) by doing some of the prep work on the weekend: cook lean meat or fish, steam veggies, boil brown rice or whole-wheat pasta, and you'll have days worth of meals ready to go.

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### **Cholesterol and Kids: Wait, Don't Medicate**



High cholesterol is no laughing matter, whether you're an adult or a child, but cholesterol-lowering prescription medication doesn't need to be the stock solution, particularly when an abundance of research indicates that lifestyle modifications such as exercise and diet can make a significant dent in the problem. Add to that the results of a recent study that suggests children with even very high cholesterol levels may experience a drop over time - without drugs or other interventions.

The study, published in *Pediatrics*, found that some children with high cholesterol levels at baseline (and warranting drug intervention according to guidelines) had levels after four years that no longer would require intervention.

Some children (and adults) with a genetic predisposition to high cholesterol or who fail to improve after conservative interventions (diet, exercise) may need to take cholesterol-lowering medication, but it's important to understand that the majority develop high cholesterol as a consequence of poor diet or obesity, both of which can be modified.

Consider this recommendation from the American Academy of Pediatrics on how to manage children with cholesterol (courtesy of WebMD): "For kids who are overweight or obese and who have a high blood-fat level or low level of 'good' HDL cholesterol, weight management is the primary treatment. This means improved diet with nutritional counseling and increased physical exercise." Drug management should be considered only in children ages 8 or older who have extremely high cholesterol and a family history of early heart disease.

Your doctor can give you a comprehensive picture of cholesterol, assess your (and your children's) cholesterol status and risk factors, and suggest natural approaches to manage high levels if warranted.

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