

Now that school is back in session children spend many hours away from home. How can parents be sure their child is eating nutritious meals? Susan Gauthier, Community Care Physicians Wellness Concierge offers some important tips for parents who are concerned that their children are getting the nutrition they need in their regular diet. Susan's office is located at the Capital Region Health Park, 711 Troy-Schenectady Rd. in Latham. She can be reached at 783-3110 extension 3347.

QUESTION: With a part-time job and two children who are involved in different sports, it seems I'm always carpooling or running in many different directions. I try to serve balanced meals at home, but that doesn't always happen. I want my kids to learn to eat right, are there any suggestions you can offer?

ANSWER: The key to healthy eating is teaching children to make the right food choices. It's important for parents to be good role models when it comes to good eating habits. Parents need to stress the importance of eating regularly, not missing meals, and especially never miss breakfast. Children often imitate their parents. If they observe their parents "eating on the run" and making unhealthy food choices, they too will adopt the same eating habits. Sharing meals together as often as possible allows parents to set a good example in healthy food choices. It also gives parents the opportunity to observe what their child is eating and to introduce them to new foods. When parents don't have the time to prepare a meal, it's important to make the right choices when ordering take-out. Fast food combines two of our favorite desires: things in a hurry and food. Unfortunately, it also tends to combine a lot of fat and calories. But it doesn't have to if we're careful. You can still get food in a hurry, but try these suggestions.

- Avoid fried foods, look for grilled or steamed items
- Keep the portions to regular and small. No "double" anything or "going large."
- Order items without the cheese.
- Don't forget fruits and vegetables

A child involved in sports provides a great opportunity for parents to communicate the importance of healthy eating. A child's desire to perform well in sports can help them focus on eating well for good performance throughout their life. Their diet should include lots of fruits and vegetables to provide vitamins and minerals. Complex carbohydrates such as pasta, rice, bread, and cereal form the foundation of a solid sports diet. These carbohydrates are like fuel for the body. Without sufficient complex carbohydrates, it's as if the body is running on empty.

One way to provide kids with the complete nutrition they need for sports is by keeping their diet colorful. Most foods containing vitamins and minerals (such as

spinach, carrots, squash, and peppers) are colored. A variety of colors of food typically are a sign of a variety of nutrients.

Natural or lightly processed foods, such as whole wheat breads and baked potatoes, are more wholesome choices than heavily processed foods, like white breads and potato chips. Usually the less processed the food, the greater the nutritional value.

It's important that school-age children get adequate amounts of dietary calcium to ensure strong, healthy bones. Calcium is the major mineral that strengthens bones. Bone calcium begins to decrease in young adulthood and progressive loss of bone calcium occurs as we age, particularly in women. Teens, especially girls, whose diets don't provide the nutrients to build bones to maximum potential are at greater risk for developing weakened bones and having disabling injuries later in life. Calcium can be added to the diet by providing low-fat and nonfat versions of dairy favorites such as cheese, yogurt and milk. Teens need to be encouraged to eat dairy foods, because teens tend to drink less milk than younger children do. Explain that these foods provide the highest-quality calcium in a form the body can absorb quickly. Encourage teens to choose low-fat or nonfat milk instead of sodas and sugary fruit drinks that contain very little or no nutrition.

The benefit associated with healthy eating helps young people to grow, develop and do well in school. Healthy eating prevents childhood and adolescent health problems such as obesity, eating disorders, dental disease, and iron deficiency anemia and may help prevent health problems later in life, including heart disease, cancer, and stroke—the three leading causes of death.