**Power foods**

Remember how Popeye ate spinach to get strong? There was truth in that. Spinach is filled with iron—an important nutrient for strengthening the body. Here’s how you can use spinach and other “power foods” to help your child grow up strong.

**Dark, leafy greens**  
Spinach and its cousins—kale and chard—contain iron that can boost thinking. Other good plant sources of iron include black beans, kidney beans, lima beans, chickpeas, lentils, soybeans, pumpkin, and winter squash. **Tip:** Vitamin C helps the body absorb iron from plants. Toss papaya chunks or strawberry slices with fresh spinach or kale for a tasty salad.

**Bananas**  
Though the old saying is “an apple a day keeps the doctor away,” a banana a day isn’t a bad idea either. Its potassium supports heart and muscle function—and can even prevent muscle cramps after exercising. **Tip:** Let your child make a “butterfly banana” by sticking on raisins for eyes, apple slices for antennas, and pretzel twists for wings.

**Oatmeal**  
Starting the day with oatmeal can increase your child’s concentration in school. That’s because oatmeal is a “slower-burning” carbohydrate, the opposite of sugary, “faster-burning” carb cereals. **Tip:** Stir blueberries into cooked oatmeal for a bonus power food—blueberries contain antioxidants that fight disease.

**Salmon**  
Give your youngster’s brain a boost with salmon and other foods high in omega-3 fatty acids. Avocados, chunk light tuna, sardines, flax seeds, walnuts, soybeans, and halibut also fall into this category. **Tip:** For an after-school snack, combine 1–2 cups canned salmon with 1 tbsp. each olive oil and lemon juice. Serve with whole-grain crackers.

**Hop to it!**

Your youngster can combine learning and physical activity with these hopscotch games.

**Math.** In each block, write an equation (4 + 11, 64 ÷ 8). Have your child toss a pebble into the first box, hop to it, and solve the problem. If she gets it right, she throws the pebble into the next box and tries that one. When she solves them all, she could write math problems for you.

**Vocabulary.** Ask your youngster to write her vocabulary words, one per block. As she hops to each one, she gives the definition. On the way back, she uses each word in a sentence.
Ice cube magic

A simple ice cube tray is a handy tool for keeping healthy ingredients on hand. Try these ideas with your youngster:

- Encourage your child to drink more water by making pretty ice cubes. She could place a blackberry or raspberry into each section of a tray and cover with water. Freeze. Then, she can use the cubes to add flavor—and fun—to water or seltzer.
- Prepare smoothie ingredients. Puree ripe fruit in a blender. Put the puree into some sections of a tray, and spoon Greek yogurt into other sections. Your youngster can combine the frozen cubes in a blender for smoothies.

Idea: For “green smoothies,” puree and freeze cooked collard greens.
- Pour low-sodium chicken, beef, or vegetable broth into a tray. When the cubes freeze, your child gets to pop them out and store in a freezer bag. Use when only a small amount of broth is needed, such as for stir-frying vegetables.

School snacks

Q: My child is supposed to bring a healthy snack to school every day, but she’s bored with what I’m packing. Any suggestions?

A: Why not let her pack her own snack? That will help her take responsibility, plus she’s more likely to eat something she put together herself.

Have her choose whole-grain cereal, dried fruits, and seeds from the bulk aisle. Then, she could make trail mix by measuring 1 tbsp. of each item into a container. Or help her air-pop popcorn and add seasonings like cinnamon, chili powder, or Old Bay.

Your youngster also might enjoy snacks she can assemble at school. For instance, suggest that she pack turkey slices to roll around breadsticks or graham crackers with low-fat cream cheese for spreading.

Note: Be sure to send perishable snacks (meat, dairy) in an insulated bag.

Young runners

For an exercise that is free, always available, and a natural for young children, you can’t do better than running! Consider these tips for becoming runners together.

Build up stamina. Begin with short runs, maybe just a block. Then, run two blocks, and then three. Or start by combining walking and running. For example, run for 30 seconds, and walk for two minutes. Gradually, run more and walk less.

Vary paths. You might run in your neighborhood, on a nearby jogging path, or around a school track. Or try trails through a park—your child will enjoy a feeling of freedom from running through the woods.

Set goals. Working toward a goal can keep your youngster motivated. Look online or in the newspaper for a 1-mile fun run or a 5K race. Suggest that he keep a log to track his progress so that he’s ready and confident on race day.

DIY nut butter

Whether you like to be creative in the kitchen or need an alternative to peanut butter for an allergic child, do-it-yourself nut butters might be your answer. Follow these easy steps.

1. Place 16 oz. of nuts (peanuts, almonds, pecans, pistachios, cashews) in a food processor or blender.
2. Process several minutes, until finely ground. Add up to 1 tbsp. canola or coconut oil, a little at a time, until creamy. For a chunky version, drop in up to 1 cup chopped nuts, and pulse to blend.
3. The beauty of making homemade nut butter is that you can flavor it however you like. For 2 tbsp. nut butter, choose mix-ins like 1 tsp. marshmallow creme and ¼ tsp. vanilla, or 1 tsp. cocoa and 1 tsp. honey.

Note: Store in the refrigerator for 6–8 weeks. If the oil separates, just stir.