Go for whole grains

Get your youngster used to eating whole grains while she’s young, and you’ll help her build a healthy habit for a lifetime. Try these strategies.

**Give details**
Begin by explaining why whole grains are good for her. You can tell her that these grains are still “wearing their coats” — they contain the entire grain kernel with all its fiber, vitamins, and minerals. Processed grains like white bread have the outer layer removed, so they’ve “lost their jackets” — where the important nutrients are.

**Build strength**
Let your youngster create her own weights using two empty quart-sized milk jugs. Help her fill them a quarter-full with sand or dry rice and screw on the cap. Suggest that she hold one in each hand as she squats, lunges, or does bicep curls. As she gets stronger, she could add sand or rice to make her weights heavier.

**Use daily**
Try adding whole grains to foods your child regularly eats. You can stir oats into lean ground beef when you’re fixing hamburgers. Or put barley or bulgur wheat in soups and casseroles. When shopping, go for the whole-grain varieties of bagels and tortillas.

**Make it gradual**
Help your youngster adjust to whole grains by working them in gradually. For instance, make both white and brown rice, and mix them together. Or prepare regular and whole-grain pasta, and toss them in a bowl with sauce. As she becomes accustomed to the taste, build up to three-quarters whole grains and then eventually to all whole grains.

**Get your winter wiggles out**
Winter’s chill might still be lingering, but your youngster can burn off pent-up energy — and get physical activity — with these indoor ideas.

- **“Drive” around the house.** Let your child use a kitchen pot lid as a pretend steering wheel. He could pick up speed by marching down the hallway or slow down as he maneuvers around furniture.

- **Follow the path.** Have your youngster make a color trail with different-colored socks (or pieces of construction paper). Then, take turns saying a color, and everyone has to walk down the path, stepping only on that color. Variation: Step on any color except the one called out.

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Q&A Healthy after-school snacks

Q: I'm concerned that my son snacks too much after school. How should I handle this?

A: Most children are hungry when they get home from school—it's a long time since lunch and a few hours until dinner. So think of your son's snack as a bridge between meals.

The important thing is to make sure the snacks he eats are healthy ones. This is a good time to get in nutrients he may be short on, like vitamins A (dried apricots), C (oranges), D (fortified milk), and E (avocado), plus minerals like calcium (bok choy) and magnesium (garbanzo beans).

The best options are often smaller portions of foods you would normally eat at mealtime, such as turkey sausage tucked into a mini pita or a cup of tomato soup. In fact, try to avoid foods typically sold as snacks, like cookies, cakes, crackers, chips, and fruit drinks. They're loaded with sugar and empty calories that will give him only a short burst of energy—and won't satisfy his hunger for the long term.

Stage a performance

Encourage your youngster to put on a live show that highlights fitness. No props required! Suggest these three themes.

1. Imagine the action. Your little actor may decide to be an action hero who saves the planet from aliens. What leaps and bounds will he use to rescue small children and animals?

2. Set up for sports. Maybe your child will reenact a scene from his favorite sports movie. He might act out a character hitting the ball and running around the bases or be a track star hurdling his way to glory.

3. “If I were a teacher...” Ask your youngster to pretend he's the PE teacher at school. He could demonstrate games or exercises he will teach the kids—and then lead you in a “class.”

OUR PURPOSE

To provide busy parents with practical ways to promote healthy nutrition and physical activity for their children.

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Savvy food shopping

Serving healthier food to your family and saving money can go hand in hand. Here's how:

- To cut down on impulse purchases, make a shopping list, and stick to it. Also, don't shop when you or your children are hungry. Tip: Enjoy a healthy meal or snack together before heading to the store.
- Consider less-expensive sources of protein. Eggs, beans, and tofu usually cost less than meat or fish.
- Buy in bulk for family staples. For instance, get family packs of chicken, and freeze meal-size portions. Or purchase rice, cereal, and other grains in bulk, and store in airtight containers.
- Avoid packaged cookies, bakery items, processed foods, and frozen treats. They're not only high in fat and low in nutrients, they're also pricey.