



## SCHOOL TO HOME SPRING

### Family Connection Features:

- Managing Busy Spring Schedules
- Balance Exercises
- Make Half Your Plate Fruits & Veggies
- Eat the Rainbow
- After-Dinner Walk
- Spring Fun & Games

### Put a spring in your step (but don't lose your balance!)

When did spring get so crazy-busy? Suddenly there are sports practices, school concerts, and all sorts of activities sending us in many different directions. Make the most of the extra daylight hours but take time to maintain as many regular family routines as possible to keep everyone on track. Below are some tips to help busy families relax, recharge and reconnect.



## SCHOOL TO HOME

# WELLNESS – EVERY PART COUNTS!

### Focus on Family Meals

#### 4 Tips for On-the-Go Family Meals

Here are some ideas to help you eat together when everyone's on-the-go!

1. Make eating together a family goal. Sometimes just setting a quantifiable and achievable goal helps make things happen! The vague feeling that, "We should eat together more," isn't really inspiring. A statement like, "Our family's goal is to eat together at least three times every week," gives you something much more solid to strive for.
2. Have dinner ready to go. If you only have 40 minutes between walking in the door and heading back out again, the only way to eat a meal together is if it's already cooked! Pull out that dusty crockpot and let dinner cook while you're away or prepare meals that can be made ahead of time and warmed-up like lasagna or quiche.
3. Keep it simple. The benefit of family meals comes from the shared time, not what's being served. Soups, sandwiches, "breakfast for dinner" or a store bought rotisserie chicken with a salad is just as effective as an elaborate dinner with all the trimmings.
4. Think outside the box. Again, the benefit comes from eating together. Dinner isn't the only meal that can be eaten as a family! If you're too busy in the evenings find time to share breakfast, lunch or brunch together during the week (Saturday or Sunday brunch is a wonderful family tradition!). If everyone is on the go maybe it's easier to meet at the soccer field for a picnic 30 minutes before practice starts instead of trying to get everyone home. Be creative!

For more ideas see this and other blog posts from Together Counts: [4 Tips for On-the-Go Family Meals](#)

### Focus on Balance

With busy schedules, it's especially important to make time to slow down, calm the mind and restore a sense of balance at the end of the day. Encourage your children to practice some of these balance exercises and basic yoga poses. Why not make it a family activity and give them a try yourself!

### Carry a Book on Your Head!

In your grandparents' day, young ladies were taught to improve their posture by walking while balancing a book on their heads. Now some yoga practitioners swear by it, too. In addition to your posture, it realigns the spine and releases tension from the neck and shoulders. Chronic back pain is a major problem in America, and with more people attached to computers and electronics, the problem is affecting young adults in their twenties and even teens. Help your child develop good posture and good habits for life!

**For kids:** When kids are feeling restless while waiting for dinner or need a break from homework, encourage them to do the "book on your head" walk. A hallway works well or they can walk in a square pattern around a room. Hardcover books work better than slippery paperbacks, but any type will do. Challenge them to see how long they can walk without dropping the book. It may take several tries and that's okay!

**For parents:** For anyone who works in an office, types at a keyboard or spends a lot of time driving or sitting, this is

a quick and effective way to strengthen your core and regain your balance. Try the 30-30 rule: Every 30 minutes, stand up from your desk, place a book on your head, and allow your spine to reset for 30 seconds. Close your eyes if you like. Sit down and continue your work for another 30 minutes.

If you find yourself slumping over the keyboard again, just grab the book and put it on your head while seated for 10 seconds. Notice how your spine shifts back so that your ears, heart and hips are aligned.

### **Outdoor Balance Games**

Playgrounds are a perfect place for kids to incorporate balance activities into their free play time. With younger kids, you can model how to walk balance-beam style on a curb, putting one foot carefully in front of the other, heel to toe. Or play “don’t step on the cracks” when walking on a sidewalk. Hopscotch is another great game for developing balance and coordination. [Note: We can add the hopscotch instructions and diagram from the K-2 section here.]

### **Yoga Poses**

#### **Stork Stand**

- Stand next to a chair. Place your hands on your hips, then stand on one leg.
- Position your other foot against the inside knee of your standing leg. Take a deep breath and see how long you can balance.
- Now switch legs.
- After a few successful stands, try it with eyes closed!

#### **Tree Pose**

- Stare at one object straight ahead in the distance to stay focused. Take a deep breath (inhale slowly in, exhale slowly out).
- Pretend you are a tree in a forest. Your feet will be roots, your legs will be trunks and your arms will be branches.
- Stand on your right leg, and imagine that leg is a tree trunk. Bring your left foot to rest on your “trunk,” above or below the knee. Raise and reach out your arms like tree branches.
- Focus on planting your roots (your standing foot) deep into the ground. Feel the sun on your face and hear the wind rustling through your leaves. Imagine birds, chipmunks and squirrels living in your branches.
- Do this pose on each leg. Is one easier than the other? Take equal turns standing on both to create balance.

Easier: Begin by leaning on a wall or chair for support. Or stand two feet from a wall, in case you need it for support.

Harder: Close your eyes and see if you can keep your balance without falling over. Pretend it’s a windy day and wave your arms (branches) gently in the wind. Hold hands with two or three other “trees” and make a forest!

#### **Eagle Pose**

Pretend you are an eagle.

- Fix your talons (feet) firmly on the ground.
- Breathe in and bend your knees.
- Breathe out and spread your wings (arms) out wide to both sides.
- Repeat as you soar through the sky!
- Now breathe in and bring your hands to your hips. Cross one leg over the other leg and try to hook your “talon” behind your calf. (Easier: Let your toes touch the ground.)
- How long can you stay in your perched position?
- Hold for as long as you can and then repeat with the other leg for balance.

Easier: Rest your back against a wall while doing this pose. Or do part one of the Eagle Pose (soar) only, but not part two (the perch).

Harder: Bring your arms out in front of you. Bend your elbows, cross one arm over the other and have your hands touch palm to palm. Now do the perch position with your legs.



## SCHOOL TO HOME WELLNESS – EVERY BITE COUNTS!

### April showers bring... rainbows of food in every color!

Farmer's markets and supermarket produce aisles are adding more and more variety as new crops are harvested at different times throughout the season. Depending on where you live, you'll likely find more local produce as fruits and vegetables become more abundant.

Here are some of the lessons we're teaching in school. Keep the colors flowing at home and ask kids what they've learned. Together, see what new varieties of produce you can discover!

### Rainbow Foods 101

#### Fruits: All kinds count!

What kinds count? Any fruit or 100% fruit juice counts as part of the Fruit Group. Fruits may be fresh, canned, frozen, or dried, and may be whole, cut-up, or pureed. Eating the whole fruit is better than drinking just its juice. This is because fiber is lost during the juicing process. Learn more here: [www.choosemyplate.gov/fruit](http://www.choosemyplate.gov/fruit)

#### Vegetables: Who's in your group?

Veggies are divided into different subgroups — each with different types and amounts of vitamins and minerals. That's why it's important to mix things up! Learn more here: [www.choosemyplate.gov/vegetables](http://www.choosemyplate.gov/vegetables)

Vegetable subgroups:

- Dark-green vegetables: Broccoli, kale, bok choy, and romaine lettuce
- Red and orange vegetables: Red peppers, tomatoes, sweet potatoes, pumpkins
- Beans and peas
- Starchy vegetables: Corn, potatoes

Variety is the spice of life! Eat a variety of:

- Vegetable subgroups
- Raw and cooked vegetables
- Colors of vegetables (eat the rainbow!)

Keep your eyes peeled for fruits and vegetables from each color group—for instance, red strawberries or peppers; orange tangerines or sweet potatoes; green grapes or broccoli; white pears, mushrooms or onions; purple plums, cabbage or olives.

See this Fruit and Veggie Color List for reference:

[www.fruitsandveggiesmorematters.org/fruit-and-veggie-color-list](http://www.fruitsandveggiesmorematters.org/fruit-and-veggie-color-list)

### **Color-of-the-Day Snacks**

Try pairing fruit and veggie combos by color for fun. This is a good way for fruit-lovers to branch out and eat more vegetables. For instance, serve slices of red apple and red peppers, orange sections with baby carrots or baked sweet potato fries, green grapes with sugar snap peas, raw coconut and raw cauliflower, raisins with small wedges of raw purple cabbage.

### **Eat Your Greenies**

Green vegetables are sometimes a hard sell with kids. But serve them raw and crunchy with a tasty dip and they're more likely to be sold! Try low-fat ranch dressing or make your own dip with plain yogurt, garlic salt and some dried herbs, and serve with a selection of raw vegetables like string beans, pea pods, zucchini and broccoli.

### **Rainbow Recipes and Multi-Colored Snacks**

#### **Rainbow of Peppers**

Cut bell peppers into strips and have family members try each color.

- Red peppers
- Yellow peppers
- Orange peppers
- Green peppers
- Purple peppers (if available)

#### **Rainbow Fruit Salad**

This can provide hours of activity — from shopping and prepping to serving and cleanup — or just 15 minutes if you have all the ingredients on hand. Either way you'll end up with a colorful, tasty and nutrient-packed family treat.

Take a trip to a supermarket or local farmer's market and let kids choose a fruit from each color of the rainbow. Set a budget in advance so you all know how much you'd like to spend on each ingredient. Teach your kids how to check what's "in season" and remember that it's fine to supplement with canned or frozen.

Back home, have kids help wash, cut and prepare the fruit. For stone fruit, you can use a sharp knife to cut the fruit in half and take out the stone, and then let them cut the flesh part with a bread knife. Put them all together in a big bowl and let kids serve their creation to other family members.

- Red: strawberries, cherries, watermelon
- Orange/yellow: oranges, cantaloupe, mango, papaya
- Green: kiwifruit, green grapes, honeydew
- White: bananas, coconut, brown pears
- Blue/purple: blueberries, purple grapes, plums

#### **Rainbow Stir-Fry**

Try the same approach as above, but with veggies! Come up with your own creative combinations, using all the colors in the rainbow. Let kids help pick out the theme and the ingredients. If you're interested in international recipes, do some research and look for recipes with interesting ingredients.

- Red: red peppers, red kidney beans, cherry tomatoes
- Orange/yellow: carrots, orange peppers, yellow summer squash, sweet corn
- Green: leeks, green onions, broccoli, bok choy, green cabbage, Chinese cabbage, green beans, peas, sugar snap peas, snow peas, green peppers, spinach, zucchini
- White: white onions, fennel, cauliflower, water chestnuts, white corn
- Blue/purple: red onions, purple cabbage, Japanese eggplant, black beans

**Quick Recipe: Mexican Rainbow Stir Fry**

1 tablespoon olive or canola oil  
1 white or yellow onion, chopped  
1 clove garlic, minced or ½ teaspoon garlic powder  
1 red pepper and 1 green pepper, chopped  
2 zucchinis, sliced and quartered  
2-3 ears of corn, kernels only  
1 can of black beans  
1 teaspoon cumin  
½ teaspoon chili powder  
½ teaspoon salt

- Heat oil in a wok or frying pan, add onion and garlic and stir-fry until soft. Add peppers next and stir-fry for one minute. Add zucchini next and stir-fry for another minute. Add corn and stir-fry for another minute. Now add the beans and seasoning and cook for one more minute.
- When you serve the meal, ask family members to identify veggies from each color of the rainbow!
- Optional: Add 1 ½ cups cooked chicken, chopped, plus ½ cup chicken stock when you add the black beans. Serve with cooked brown rice and shredded cheese. Garnish with black olives and green onions to add more color, and add another red veggie to the table with a bowl of salsa!

**Super-Quick Recipe: Easy Green Stir-Fry**

1 tablespoon olive or canola oil  
2 leeks or a handful of green onions, sliced  
Your choice of other veggies from the Green group: broccoli, bok choy, green cabbage, Chinese cabbage, green beans, peas, sugar snap peas, snow peas, green peppers, spinach, zucchini, etc.  
1 tablespoon low-sodium soy sauce

- Heat oil in a wok or frying pan, add chopped green onions or leeks (or substitute a yellow/white/red onion) and stir-fry until soft. Then add your other ingredients, whichever ones you choose, one at a time.
- Start with veggies that take longer to cook (like broccoli and green beans) and leave ones like spinach until the end. Stir-fry veggies until cooked but still crunchy (no more than five minutes).
- Add 1 teaspoon of low-sodium soy sauce at the end and give a final stir. Serve with cooked brown rice and braised tofu or cooked chicken, meat or seafood on the side.



## SCHOOL TO HOME

# WELLNESS – EVERY MOVE COUNTS!

### **Catch the Baseball Season Spirit**

What happens when you want to play but don't have enough people to form a team?

#### **Play Catch**

No gloves required! Simple instructions: Use a tennis ball or similar soft ball, match kids up into pairs or threesomes, and have them play catch. That's it!

#### **Play Invisible Baseball**

Don't have a ball or bat or time for a game? Play "invisible" baseball and act out the actions instead, mime style. Practice pitching and practice batting on your own, or gather a group for an "invisible" ball game.

#### **Run the Bases**

Don't have a bat or ball? Go outside and just run the bases. Don't have real bases? Use rocks or sweatshirts or whatever you can find to mark the spots. It's a great excuse to get outside in the fresh air.

#### **After-Dinner Walk**

Days are getting longer. Take advantage of the extra daylight hours by getting outside after dinner. Start a tradition like an AWD (after-dinner walk) and let kids bring scooters, skateboards or bikes if they like. Whether for 15 minutes or a half an hour, it's a nice way to get some extra fresh air and burn some more energy at the end of the day. Plus it's good for digesting your meal and getting you all ready for a good night's sleep.



**Home to School Wellness Charts**

FAMILY ACTIVITIES	Date(s)	Notes: Which ones did you try??
Balance Exercises		
Yoga Poses		
Rainbow Recipe		
After-Dinner Walk		
Other Physical Activity		
<i>Any recipes or activity ideas to share?</i>		

**Signatures**

Student's signature \_\_\_\_\_

Parent/Guardian's signature \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher's signature \_\_\_\_\_