

ready, set, **LEARN**

BACK-TO-SCHOOL NUTRITION

While you're stocking up on back-to-school supplies, don't forget to build your kids' stores of the nutritional supplies they'll need to be physically, mentally, and emotionally prepared to return to the classroom.

"Study after study shows that you can increase intelligence, attention span, concentration, problem-solving ability, emotional response, mood, physical coordination—all the facets of intelligence—simply by changing what goes into and onto their bowls, plates, and lunch boxes," write Patrick Holford and Deborah Colson, authors of *Optimum Nutrition for Your Child's Mind*. And while students with serious behavioral and learning issues have been shown to benefit enormously from simple dietary changes, optimum nutrition can help sharpen every child's mind and mood for peak learning.

Focus on the foods that will feed your family's brains:

Complex carbohydrates: Children and teens (and adults too!) who get their energy from complex carbohydrates—vegetables, whole grains, beans, and legumes—avoid the crash-and-burn that follows a sugar high. Those foods are also loaded with vitamins and fiber.

Protein: A good supply of protein will keep your child's brain running smoothly. Toddlers need 13 grams per day, while teenage boys require 52 grams. The Harvard School of Public Health suggests choosing poultry, fish, and beans over red meat.

Omega 3s and 6s: There's a reason they're called "essential" fats. They help children stay physically active and lower their risk of developing allergies, asthma, and infection. They promote mental health: A deficiency may correlate with learning disabilities, behavior issues, fatigue, and memory problems.

Incorporate flaxseed or flaxseed oil, walnuts, and oily fish like salmon, sardines, and mackerel into your menu to get the brain benefits of essential fats, particularly omega 3s. These important nutrients are also available in kid-friendly supplements.

Vitamins/minerals: Are your children getting the vitamins and minerals they need from their diet or a daily multi? For maximum brain health, be sure their intake includes all the B vitamins, including folic acid, plus C, magnesium, manganese, and zinc.

Kids being kids, they don't always appreciate unfamiliar or gourmet foods, so making sure their diets are well balanced can be a challenge. Try making oatmeal not just palatable but delicious by adding cinnamon, fruit, and nuts. And many kids will chomp down frozen blueberries like candy. Cutting fruit into bite-sized pieces makes it more appealing too. And remember, the best way to ensure that your children are getting all the nutrients they need is to vary your menus. So resist the urge to revert to the old standbys—the fruits and veggies you know they'll eat—and make an attempt to add some new favorites into the mix. TFL