

Healthy Celebrations

School celebrations provide a unique opportunity for fun while participating in healthy activities. If food is part of occasional celebrations, serve food that tastes good, is nutritious, and provides students with opportunity for nutrition education experiences.

But it's Just a Cupcake...



Typically, foods for school celebrations include cupcakes, candy, cookies and soda. So what's the harm? There is nothing wrong with an occasional treat, but unhealthy choices have become the norm rather than the exception. Parties, treats used as classroom rewards, food fundraisers, and snacks expose children to high-fat, high-sugar, low-nutrient choices. A cupcake (250-700 calories) and fruit drink (100 cal) can add significantly to students' calories with low nutrition.

Our children's overall eating habits are poor. Only two percent of children meet all Food Pyramid recommendations. Most children do not eat enough fruits, vegetables or whole grains. Obesity rates among children are on the rise, with serious health consequences. Constant exposure to low-nutrient foods makes it difficult for children to learn how to make healthy food choices. By providing students with nutritious choices wherever food is available (including the classroom), schools can positively influence children's eating habits.

Benefits of Healthy Celebrations

1. Healthy Kids Learn Better

Research clearly demonstrates that good nutrition is linked to better behavior and academic performance. To provide the best possible learning conditions for children, schools must also provide an environment that supports healthy behaviors.

2. Provides Consistent Messages

Providing healthy classroom celebrations demonstrate a school commitment to promoting healthy behaviors. It supports health lessons, instead of contradicting them. Healthy celebrations promote positive lifestyle choices to reduce student health risks and improve learning.

3. Promotes a Healthy School Environment

To positively change eating behaviors, students need to receive consistent, reliable health information and opportunities to use it. Healthy celebrations are an important part of providing a healthy school environment.

4. Creates Excitement about Nutrition

Children are excited about new, different things, including fun party activities and healthy snacks. Teachers need not worry that children will be disappointed if typical party foods aren't served in school. Holiday treats and traditional birthday parties will still be available at home.

5. Protects Children with Food Allergies

When parents send in food, it is difficult to ensure the safety of children with food allergies. Schools can protect food allergic children by providing nonfood celebrations or, if food is served, obtaining it from known sources or fresh fruit and vegetables.



How-To's for Healthy Parties

- Variety is the "spice of life" and the "life of the party." Plan several contrasting activities – active and quiet, indoor and outdoor, individual and group.
- Try something new. Children like adventure. In addition to familiar games and foods, offer something different.
- Plan creative experiences such as art, music, and cooking.
- Involve children in planning and preparing the party. Let them make decorations and favors.
- If used, put food in its proper place. Refreshments should complement the fun, not become the "main event."
- Don't use food as rewards or prizes. Select a physical activity instead.
- Choose food for fun, good taste and health. Parties that feature healthful foods provide opportunities for children to practice making wise food choices.



Healthy Celebrations

Make the Healthy Choice the Easy Choice

Choose a variety of activities, games and crafts that children enjoy. When food is served, make it count with healthy choices! Parties can even incorporate a fun nutrition lesson by involving children in the planning and preparation of healthy snacks. Try these ideas for fun activities and healthy foods at school parties and other celebrations. *Check for allergies before serving food to students.

Activities to Celebrate the Child

- Plan special party games and activities. Ask parents to provide game supplies, pencils, erasers, stickers and other small school supplies instead of food.
- Create a healthy party idea book. Ask school staff and parents to send in healthy recipes and ideas for activities, games and crafts. Compile these ideas into a book.
- Give children extra recess time instead of a class party. For birthdays, let the birthday child choose and lead an active game.
- Instead of food, ask parents to purchase a book for the classroom or school library in the birthday child's name. Read it to the class or invite the child's parents to come in and read it.
- Instead of a party, organize a special community service project, (e.g. invite senior citizens for program.) Involve parents in planning the project and providing needed materials.
- Create a "Celebrate Me" book. Have classmates write stories or poems and draw pictures to describe what is special about the birthday child.
- The birthday child is the teacher's assistant for the day, and gets to do special tasks like make deliveries to office, lead the line, start an activity, and choose a game or story.



Healthy Food Ideas:

- Low-fat or nonfat milk; 100% juice; water; add fruit slice(s) to water/100% juice
- Fruit smoothies (blend berries, bananas, pineapple and ice)
- Fresh fruit assortment; fruit and cheese kabobs; fruit salad; fruit with low-fat whipped topping
- Dried fruit (raisins, cranberries, apricots, mango, kiwi, banana chips)
- Vegetable trays with low-fat dip; celery and carrots with peanut butter and raisins
- Whole grain crackers with low-fat cheese cubes, string cheese, or hummus
- Multigrain waffles or pancakes topped with fruit
- Whole wheat mini bagels or whole wheat English muffin with peanut butter or applesauce; fruit or mini whole grain muffin
- Pretzels, Popcorn, rice cakes
- Cheese or turkey sandwich, wraps, or pitas (with low-fat condiments and veggies)
- Quesadillas or bean burrito slices with salsa
- Granola bars
- Baked tortilla chips with salsa or bean dip; pita chips with hummus
- Trail/cereal mix (whole-grain, low-sugar cereals mixed with dried fruit & low-salt pretzels /nuts)
- Seeds and nuts