

To feed the mind it is necessary to feed the body healthfully

Our hectic holiday schedules disrupt our regular routines. And that disruption only worsens many young children's typical eating habits.

Although many educators decry the learning losses over summer break, it is possible a similar decline occurs in the hustle and bustle of the holiday season. This is the time of the year to double down on efforts to feed children food that will aid, rather than hinder, the learning process.

More is learned every day about the connection between what children eat and their ability to focus and sustain attention. In the book "Endangered Minds: Why Children Don't Think and What We Can Do About It," Jane M. Healy writes, "It is indeed hard, perhaps even impossible, to teach well if students' nutritional or emotional agendas pre-empt their mental energy."

Children who eat breakfast show increased school performance, short-term memory and attention. Eating



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breakfast is key, and what kids eat for breakfast matters. Eating whole grains — such as oatmeal and proteins like low-fat milk or eggs — give children the long-lasting energy they need to get through the morning.

Above all else, parents should avoid feeding their children sugary cereals. They are digested quickly, causing the body to peak and then crash. The best and worst cereals nutrition-wise can be found at cerealfacts.org.

A healthful snack between meals helps keep glucose levels stable and keeps kids focused. The options for

snacks on grocery-store shelves are endless, but they are also high in calories and low in nutrition.

Processed, packaged and prepared snack foods should be avoided whenever possible.

The best snacks include lean protein, fruit and vegetables. Great choices include carrots with hummus or Greek yogurt dip, apples with peanut butter, dried fruit and nuts, or vegetables and reduced-fat cheese.

Children consume 11 percent of their calories each day from sugary drinks and energy beverages. These drinks contain added sugars, caffeine, plenty of calories and zero nutritional benefits. Children need to drink water or unflavored, low-fat milk throughout the day.

Perhaps the best gift to give a child in the holiday season is a commitment to nutritional eating.

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Sugary cookies provide quick, but not lasting, energy. YOKO FURUKAWA/THE REPUBLIC

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