

EDUCATION

Put ‘Brain Power’ on the Back-to-School List

NewsUSA

(NU) - That groan you hear is most likely the collective sound of children’s disappointment that summer is almost over and a new school year is about to begin. And while you’ve probably thought of all the back-to-school essentials, there’s something you might not have considered – brain health.

Based on considerable research indicating that diet, exercise and rest can help improve cognitive performance, the California Innovations BrainFuel program helps parents lay a strong foundation for their children’s education. It features short articles that highlight recent brain research, the impact that sleep and fitness have on mental acuity, quick tips for packing smarter lunches, and recipes for brain-healthy meals. Here are a few tips to get you started:

- **Skip the snooze and make breakfast.** Research has found that breakfast-eaters have higher school attendance, reduced tardiness, better behavior, and stronger test performance than breakfast-skippers.
- **Drop the pop.** Is soda pop really that bad? “Yup. Affirmative. Absolutely,” says board-certified nutritionist and author Jonny Bowden, PhD, CNS. Loaded with high-fructose corn syrup, soda pop offers a lot of calories and no nutritional value. Stick with the basics – 100 percent juice, milk, or plain old water.
- **Go nuts!** For snacks, skip the potato chips and pack nuts instead (allergies aside, of course). Walnuts are high in Omega-3 and antioxidants like vitamin E and vitamin B6.
- **Focus on fitness.** Experts aren’t exactly sure how exercise fuels learning, but they know that



Packing a healthy lunch and snacks may boost children’s school performance.

it does. According to Dr. John J. Ratey, clinical associate professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School, “Exercise itself doesn’t make you smarter, but it puts the brain of the learners in the optimal position for them to learn.” Studies show that exercise enables cells to sprout synapses, which are crucial to forming connections the brain needs in order to learn.

- **Encourage plenty of sleep.** “Even minor changes in sleep... can impair a school kid’s learning, memory, attention [and] concentration,” says researcher Avi Sadeh, DSc, director of the Laboratory for Children’s Sleep and Arousal Disorders at Tel Aviv University.

The California Innovations BrainFuel program is made possible with support from LeapFrog, Horizon, Every Day with Rachael Ray, Bumble Bee, Dole Fruit Bowls, Parents Magazine and other sponsors. Get additional tips, learn more, and register for the \$30,000 Sweepstakes at www.brainfuel4kids.com.