

Your Health Matters

I LOVE BROCCOLI

This week, I received a Facebook post from a local Mom with a picture of her son's first day of school. The little boy held up a sign that read:

- Favorite Color - Green and Red
- Favorite Food - Broccoli
- Favorite TV show - Anything with Dinosaurs.

What is so special about this Facebook post, is that this little boy last year only ate chicken nuggets and Lunchables. It was not until our nurse, Kathie Hoette and Lana the Iguana went to Immaculate Conception Preschool to teach kids about healthy eating. This same little boy discovered that he loved broccoli after tasting it for the first time with Lana.

As children head back to school this month, what they eat for breakfast, lunch and snacks is very important to their attitude and school performance. Whether they pack a lunch or eat from the school menu, making healthy food choices is critical to their growth and development.

Studies show that proper nutrition improves a child's ability to succeed at school. It increases energy, improves performance, and reduces absenteeism. Eating healthy foods improves a child's emotional functioning, leads to improved test scores, and results in a host of other positive outcomes. Basically, nutrition in – success out!

Feeding your child a healthy breakfast will ensure his day gets off to the best start. Choose foods with fiber and avoid sugar. Oatmeal, shredded wheat cereals, bananas or whole grain pancakes will help control your child's adrenaline levels and improve her day.

Allow your child to help pack his own lunch. Talk about the different food groups and encourage her to pack one thing from each food group. Discuss portion sizes as your child puts foods into small containers or sandwich bags. Suggest that your child choose different colored vegetables and fruits each day to get a variety of valuable vitamins and nutrients.

If your child eats from the school menu, encourage her to make healthy choices, like fresh fruits or a salad with her meal. Encourage him to drink low-fat milk or water with his meal.

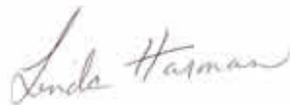
Encourage your teens to eat healthy, also. At their age, growth and body changes are happening so quickly, their nutrient requirements increase. For example, adolescents need at least 1200 mg of calcium a day to develop strong bones, but most of them take in less than 1000 mg a day.

One of the most important things you can do to encourage your children to eat healthy is be a good role model.

- Make healthy menu choices for family meals.
- Allow sweet treats in moderation.
- Limit fruit juice and soda and encourage low fat milk and water.
- Make mealtime a fun family event.
- Turn off the TV and get active as a family.

Stay positive and take small steps together. If you encourage your children to establish healthy eating patterns now, they are more likely to continue to make good choices as they grow older. Maybe they will even learn to love broccoli!

The Montgomery County Health Department loves taking care of your family, and works every day to protect, promote and improve health in our community. To learn more, call 573-564-2495 or visit us online at www.montgomerycountyhealth.org or on Facebook or Twitter @healthymoco. ■

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Linda Harman".

8.22.16