Stock Your Kitchen for Back-to-School Success

10/21/2026

Back-to-school season often brings busy mornings, packed schedules, and less time to prepare meals. Keeping a variety of healthy staples on hand can save time, reduce last-minute trips to the grocery store, and make packing lunches and preparing snacks much easier. Aim to keep a variety of food from each food group available, including fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean proteins, and dairy. When nutritious foods are stocked, visible, and easy to reach, the healthy choice becomes the easy choice.

Consider keeping these nutritious staples on hand.

Pantry Staples

Keep these shelf-stable foods on hand for quick meals and snacks. Whole grains, such as oats, popcorn, brown rice, and whole-grain cereal, along with beans, provide fiber to support healthy digestion and help you feel satisfied. Nuts, seeds, and nut butters provide healthy fats, protein, and other important nutrients. Because pantry staples have a longer shelf life, they stay fresh for longer periods. Many can be paired with refrigerator staples (such as whole-grain crackers with cheese or yogurt with berries and granola) for a quick snack.

- Whole-grain crackers
- Whole-grain tortillas
- Oats
- Nut butter or sunflower seed butter
- Low-sodium canned beans
- Brown rice or whole-grain pasta
- Low-sugar cereal
- Popcorn
- Trail mix or nuts

Refrigerator Favorites

The refrigerator is a great place to keep nutrient-dense foods. Fruits and vegetables provide vitamins, minerals, and fiber, while foods such as yogurt, cheese, eggs, hummus, and lean meats provide protein and other nutrients and minerals, such as calcium. Washing and cutting fruits and vegetables ahead of time and storing them where they are easy to see and reach makes them a convenient choice when hunger strikes. When nutritious options are ready to grab, the whole family may be more likely to choose them for a quick snack.

- Low-fat yogurt
- Cheese sticks or sliced cheese
- Hard-boiled eggs
- Hummus
- Fresh fruit
- Washed and cut vegetables
- Lean proteins (cooked chicken, turkey slices, cottage cheese)

Freezer Essentials

Frozen foods are a great way to reduce food waste while keeping nutritious ingredients on hand. Frozen fruits and vegetables are just as rich in nutrients as their fresh counterparts. Frozen vegetables make a quick and convenient addition to recipes. Consider adding frozen corn to ground beef, frozen berries to smoothies, and freeze those leftovers for easy dinners!

- Frozen fruits for smoothies
- Frozen vegetables
- Whole-grain waffles
- Homemade leftovers

Help Kids Build Balanced Snacks

Encourage children to combine foods from different food groups to help them stay satisfied between meals. Pairing a source of protein with a fruit, vegetable, or whole grain provides lasting energy. Keeping healthy choices visible and easy to reach also helps children become more independent in making nutritious choices.

Some easy combinations include:

- Apple slices with peanut butter
- Yogurt with berries
- Cheese and whole-grain crackers
- Hummus with cut veggies
- Hard-boiled eggs with grapes

Try These Back-to-School Recipes from Utah State University Create Better Health Kitchen

Ham and Turkey Snack Wrap

This Ham, Turkey, Swiss & Apple Wrap combines whole grains, lean protein, dairy, and fresh fruit into a simple meal that's easy to assemble and perfect for busy school days.Enjoy it withthe leftover apple slices for a balanced meal or snack.

Find the recipehere.

Cinnamon Roll Protein Energy Balls

Protein Energy Balls are perfect for lunchboxes or after-school snacks. They come together in just a few minutes, require no baking, and can be stored in the refrigerator for a grab-and-go snack all week.

Find the recipe here.

Oatmeal Nut Pancakes

Oatmeal Nut Pancakes make a satisfying breakfast or on the go snack. Top with peanut butter, banana, berries or yogurt and honey. Make a batch ahead of time and refrigerate or freeze extras for busy school mornings.

Find the recipe here.

A stocked kitchen doesn't have to be expensive or complicated. Keeping a variety of simple, nutritious ingredients on hand makes it easier to prepare healthy meals, pack school lunches, and fuel your family throughout the year. For more healthy recipes, meal ideas, and nutrition resources, visit the USU Extension Create Better Health Kitchen at https://extension.usu.edu/createbetterhealth/kitchen/.

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