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Don't Let Your Family's Healthy Eating Take a Vacation This Summer

BY LISA BEACH

While dog-day afternoons and balmy summer nights might easily lull you into a more relaxed lifestyle, don't put your family's healthy eating habits on snooze while you downshift into summer mode. Although you probably welcome this slower pace if your life normally runs at warp speed, you might need to put a new twist on your usual eating strategies to stay on top of special summer situations.

While everyone loves to indulge in a summer treat once in a while, don't let an ice cream cone, concession stand hot dog or gas station stop turn into a summer-long binge of bad eating.

Whether you're going on a weeklong vacation or just taking a day trip out of town, you need some solid

strategies to keep your family eating healthy during the summer.

► On vacation

If you'll be driving to your vacation destination, a little pre-trip detective work will help you eat healthy en route.

"When you're going on vacation, planning ahead really helps. If you take the time to plan out where you're going to stay, you should also scope out the restaurants ahead of time," suggests Sara Haas, RDN, LDN, a registered dietitian nutritionist, chef and a national media spokesperson for the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. "Instead of scrambling at the last minute to stop at

a fast-food place along the way, you've got a list of restaurants that you know serve healthy food options."

You could even rely on smartphone apps (such as Around Me, Feed or Yelp) to suggest nearby options along the way based on your current location.

Once you've found a place to eat with healthy options, watch out for this common trap: Free drink refills.

"If your kids fill up on those bottomless glasses of soda, juice or even milk, they're loading up on liquid calories and not really eating any nutritious food," warns Haas. "Instead, just order water and ask the server to bring out slices of oranges, lemons and limes to let your kids make their own flavored water at the table. It will give the kids something to do, but it will also give them an incentive to

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be creative and then drink the water they made.”

Another pitfall? Gas station convenience stores. When you stop for gas, kids get out to stretch and then make a beeline for the snack aisle in the store.

“Go ahead and let them pick something,” says Haas, “but you choose three relatively healthy options and let your child choose from those three things. That way, you’re in control, but they feel a little bit in control because they still get to choose.”

Okay, you’ve finally arrived at your destination - now what? One perk of vacationing is the opportunity to explore new places, including local restaurants. But how can you enjoy trying fun new foods while traveling without loading up on sugar, sodium and saturated fat?

The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics offers some additional tips for eating right while on your summer vacation:

- Sample small amounts of high-calorie food. You don’t have to avoid it entirely. Just eat a few bites.
- Many restaurants serve large portions so don’t hesitate to split orders.
- It can be easy to ‘graze’ while on vacation. Try to set meal times and stick to them.
- For additional healthy eating tips, visit eatright.org.

Another tip to keep your healthy vacation eating on track? Keep your eating forays in check by eating *in* more than eating *out* if you can. Try renting a condo with a kitchen or bringing a small cooler to store a few perishable foods. Head to a nearby grocery store and buy a week’s worth of milk, cereal, bread, fresh fruit, vegetables and canned tuna or chicken. You’ll save money and calories by preparing one or two meals each day in your home-away-from-home.

► On a day trip

If your family plans to go to an out-of-town fair or festival, theme park, water park or even a lake or a beach, planning ahead once again tops the list of ways to eat healthier while enjoying summer family fun.

For the car ride, place coolers and lunch bags in the back seat instead of the trunk to keep them cooler and accessible. Pack them with healthy snack and meal options, making sure perishable food doesn’t sit unrefrigerated for more than two hours.

Try these healthy options:

- Stock up on fresh vegetables and fruit for snacks, like cut broccoli florets, carrot sticks, and apple and orange slices.
- For beverages, bring canned or boxed 100 per cent fruit juice, canned tomato juice and bottled water.
- Pack easy-to-transport, shelf-stable foods. Good choices include cereal, trail mix, popcorn, single-serve applesauce, and peanut butter sandwiches.
- Deli sandwiches, yogurt and low-fat cheese make a great lunch.

Want to increase the chance that your kids will eat healthy snacks (whether at home or on the road)? Haas suggests letting kids make their own snack bags and making it fun so they’ll want to eat them. For example, put the snacks in a brown bag and put stickers on the bag. In fact, a study from Cornell University’s Food & Brand Lab found that any sticker encouraged a healthy choice (like an apple) over an unhealthy choice (such as a cookie). With younger kids, in particular, sometimes all it takes is a little creativity to make healthy food more appealing.

While you’re on the road, talk to kids ahead of time about what kind of drinks and snacks they can have once you arrive at your destination. “Offer up a few choices that they can pick from, such as a soft pretzel, peanuts or a box of Crackerjacks,” advises Haas. “If you don’t prepare them ahead of time, they’ll probably keep asking for a lot of junky snacks throughout the day. You’ll end up saying ‘no’ all day, which can spoil everyone’s mood. If you lay the groundwork before you get there, your kids won’t be surprised.”

Some places - like many zoos, theme parks and water parks - often allow you to bring your own food inside or offer picnic-eating areas outside the front entrance. Take advantage of that option to save money and maintain better control over what your family eats for lunch. Then splurge on a treat later, like a round of frozen lemonades or ice cream cones.

Cranberry Pumpkin Granola Bars

Make a batch of these healthy granola bars for your next road trip.

- 1 ½ cups old-fashioned oats
- ½ cup pumpkin seeds
- ¼ cup pecans, roughly chopped
- 1 Tbsp. butter
- 1 Tbsp. pumpkin pie spice
- ¼ cup pumpkin purée
- ¼ cup maple syrup
- ¼ tsp. salt
- ½ cup prunes, very finely chopped (or pulsed fine in a food processor)
- ½ cup dried cranberries, very finely chopped (or pulsed fine in a food processor)

1. Preheat oven to 300°F. Line a 9 x 9-inch pan with parchment paper. (Using two overlapping strips works well here for removing the bars from the pan after baking.)

2. In a large bowl, combine the oats and the pumpkin seeds.

3. Heat a small pot or pan over medium heat and add the butter. Once the butter has melted, stir in the pumpkin pie spice and cook, stirring constantly, for 1 minute. Add the pumpkin purée and cook 1 more minute. Stir in the maple syrup, salt, prunes and

cranberries. Remove from heat and pour over the oat mixture.

4. Pour the oat mixture into the prepared pan and spread evenly across the bottom. Using a piece of foil, wax paper or parchment paper, cover the granola bars and push down evenly on the top to compress the mixture. The firmer the bar, the better it will hold together after it’s cooked. Remove foil, wax paper or parchment and place in the oven.

5. Cook bars for 15 minutes. Remove pan from the oven and set on a rack to cool. Once cooled, transfer the pan to the refrigerator and chill for at least 2 hours. Using the parchment paper, remove the bars from the pan and cut into individual bars. (Why chill them? This helps them firm up, which makes cutting them easier!)

► NOTES

Cut the pan 5 x 3 to get 15 bars. Keep them in the refrigerator for up to five days or in the freezer for up to two months.

Recipe reprinted with permission from Sara Haas, RDN, LDN. Find more of her healthy recipes at sarahasrdn.com.



“When we go on vacation or to special places and events, we tend to think, ‘Oh, let’s just treat ourselves because we *never* do this.’ And I think that’s totally fair,” says Haas. “But I think it’s better, especially if you have kids, not to talk it up so much. Don’t hype up how awesome it’s going to be when you finally get that ice cream. Just enjoy the splurge without making a big deal about it.”

Finally, be aware that marketers pitch their high-calorie beverages at places they like to call your “points of sweat”: the beach, golf course or theme park. But downing these drinks often adds up to plenty of empty

calories that don’t satisfy your appetite. The solution? If the venue allows it, take refillable water bottles with you so you’ll have a sugar-free, zero-calorie thirst-quencher on hand to keep hydrated.

With these solid strategies, you can keep your family eating healthy on the road when away from home this summer.

Lisa is a freelance writer, humor blogger and mother of two teens. Check out her writer’s website at lisabeachwrites.com, and visit her humor blog at tweeniormoments.com. **CCM**



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