

GRAND ROUNDS

Healthy bodies. Healthy brains.

It's a simple equation that parents need to keep in mind as the summer fun winds down and children across Renfrew County prepare for another school year.

From the food that is packed in their lunch kits to the amount of physical activity students have outside of the classroom, it all contributes to their academic performance inside the classroom according to Dr. Anne Rowan-Legg, a full-time specialist in pediatric medicine at the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario with privileges at RVH where she conducts a monthly clinic.

Children need a balanced diet with food from all four food groups—vegetables and fruit, grain products, milk and alternatives, and meat and alternatives.

"Children might not eat the recommended amount from each food group every day. But if you offer a good variety, they'll probably get what they need over the course of a week or two."

Kick-starting your family's day with a good breakfast is also an essential component of a healthy lifestyle. Nutritious snacks offered in between meals are equally important, she says.

"The best foods are whole, fresh and unprocessed—fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, dairy and meats; and home-cooked meals."

Dr. Rowan-Legg offers some easy tips that everyone can incorporate into their day, beginning by serving vegetables and fruit more often than fruit juice. Offer water when your child is thirsty, especially between meals and snacks. Limit juice to one serving (120 mL/4 oz) of 100% unsweetened juice a day.

"Smoothies are a good (and fun) way of meeting fruit requirements as well as containing some dairy (yogurt)." Limit processed meats, such as wieners and luncheon meats, which are also high in fat, sodium (salt), and nitrates. Also, limit pop consumption.

Everyone should be mindful of food allergies when choosing foods for lunches, as they can have serious consequences—sometimes fatal—for anyone who is allergic to peanuts, for example. The policies vary from school to school with some having a school-wide ban on nuts, and other schools allowing peanuts if there is no child with an allergy in the same classroom. It is best advised to send peanut-free lunches for the first few days of school

and the school will advise if there are any lunchtime items that are not permitted for the safety of others.

For teens, Dr. Rowan-Legg suggests getting them involved in preparing their packed lunch. "It's important that they develop good nutritional skills and that they don't always buy a lunch at school."

From Junior Kindergarten to Grade 12 it is important that kids spend some time participating in some type of exercise every day. During the summer months kids typically spend more time outside—swimming, biking, playing—and then are required to sit in the classroom from September to June.

The Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines were published in 2011 by the Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology. They state that children and youth aged 5 to 17 years should get 60 minutes of moderate-vigorous physical activity daily, with vigorous activity three days per week.

Moderate activity would include: bike riding and playground playing, she says. Vigorous activity examples are running and swimming.

Her tips to get more activity in your children's day are as simple as using the local playground. Walk, bike, skateboard to school (or part way to school for more rural families). Engage in neighbourhood sports: basketball at the park, pick-up hockey, swimming. Or get involved—play a game of tag with younger children.

She realizes this may be tough, as students today are inundated with technology—watching television, using cell phones, playing video games and working on computers. The best way to fit in the recommended activity time is to limit screen time to one to two hours a day. And a good rule for everyone is to keep screens out of bedrooms—no television or computers. "Practice a no device policy during a set 'family time' (e.g., at the dinner table) and remember that late-night texting or watching TV cuts into much-needed sleep."

It's been shown that children and youth who are more physically active experience benefits beyond improved health and fitness. "They do better in school, feel happier, maintain a healthy body weight, and improve their self-confidence," says Dr. Rowan-Legg.



Nutritious lunches and snacks are an important part of a healthy lifestyle.