

By: Alisha Fisher
K-State Extension Greenwood County
Family and Community Wellness Extension Agent
“Healthy Summer Habits”

As summer break settles in and school routines fade, maintaining healthy eating habits can become a challenge for many families. However, summer is also an ideal time to reinforce healthy habits by establishing consistent meal routines and encouraging regular hydration.

One of the best ways to support children’s health during the summer is by maintaining structure around meals and snacks. Without the routine of the school day, children may be more likely to graze throughout the day, often reaching for convenience foods that are high in sugar, fat, and sodium. Instead, families can aim for a schedule that includes three balanced meals and one or two planned snacks each day. This approach helps ensure children receive the nutrients they need, including vitamins, minerals, fiber, and quality sources of protein.

Summer provides an excellent opportunity to take advantage of seasonal produce. Fruits and vegetables that are in season are often more affordable, flavorful, and nutritious. Common Kansas summer produce includes peaches, berries, corn, cucumbers, watermelon, green beans, summer squash, cabbage, broccoli, and okra. Many of these foods also have a high water content, making them a great way to support hydration during hot weather.

Hydration becomes especially important during the summer months, as children spend more time outdoors and temperatures rise. Starting the day with a glass or two of water can help replace fluids lost overnight and establish healthy hydration habits from the moment they wake up. Parents can make water more appealing by adding fruit slices, berries, cucumbers, or lime. Allowing children to personalize their water bottles with stickers can also encourage them to drink more throughout the day. For families looking for alternatives to sugary beverages, flavored sparkling water may provide a lower-sugar option than soda.

Building balanced meals is another key component of healthy summer eating. Harvard University’s Kids’ Healthy Plate model recommends filling half the plate with fruits and vegetables, one-quarter with whole grains, and one-quarter with protein. Breakfast is a great opportunity to put this guidance into practice. Oatmeal, for example, provides fiber and can easily be enhanced with berries, Greek yogurt, or peanut butter for additional vitamins, minerals, and protein. When purchasing breakfast cereals, parents should look for options that contain whole grains, provide fiber, and are lower in added sugars. Simple lunches such as wraps can be prepared ahead of time and packed with fruits, vegetables, and lean protein sources.

Children who help select recipes, shop for ingredients, and prepare meals are often more willing to try new foods and develop positive attitudes toward healthy eating. Children learn by example, so when parents and caregivers make healthy choices, such as drinking water regularly and including nutritious foods at meals, children are more likely to adopt those habits themselves. By focusing on structure, hydration, and balanced meals, families can help children stay healthy, active, and energized all summer long.

Information comes from Kansas State University Publications.