

Healthy Back to School Habits

By

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With school back in session and everyone back on a fall schedule, parents are often faced with the difficult decision of what to prepare for breakfast, lunch, supper, and the snacks to meet the nutritional needs of their growing children. They are also concerned about physical activity and the amount of time spent in front of a screen, whether it is television, computer, or video games. Here are some suggestions you might want to try. They are from the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute's website that you might want to visit at your convenience. There are three messages that are important for parents and children as they make the move to becoming healthier. Those three messages are eat right, get active, and reduce screen time.

Eat Right! Learn the **ABC**'s of saving calories and money when you shop for groceries to pack your kids' lunches or to serve healthy snacks. Always use ads and store coupons and bonus cards, which may offer discounts on healthy foods like fruits and veggies. **Buy** produce in season or at local farmers markets to cut costs. Fall is often the best time of year to find a wide range of local produce. **Compare** brands and package sizes to find the best buy. Be sure to read the Nutrition Facts label on packaged food to choose products with lower numbers for calories, saturated and trans fats, sodium, and sugars. Turn food shopping into family time after school or on the weekends! Bring your kids along and teach them to look out for healthy choices.

Get Active! Kicking off the school year can be a busy time. These three steps can help you fit in some physical activity. **Keep track** of how your family spends time for one week. **Start small.** Find two 30-minute time slots when your family can be active together after school or on the weekends. **Get going.** Try these great tips:

- Walk your kids to school
- Ride bikes after dinner
- Play baseball
- Jump rope
- Shoot baskets
- Dance
- Walk the dog
- Play tag
- Rake leaves

Reduce Screen Time! Kids spend a big part of their day sitting in the classroom. Help your children spend less time in front of the television, computer, and video games—and more time having fun as a family. **Turn off the TV** during mealtime and talk with your children about what they learned in school that day. Families who eat together tend to eat healthier. **Limit screen time** to two hours each day for children two years and older. **Suggest playing outside** after school and join in the fun. **Be a good role model.** If you reduce your screen time and move more, your kids will too!

By visiting the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute's website you can learn more ways to eat healthy as you get back into the swing of the school year schedule and you can get more tips on keeping your family active and how you can reduce your family's screen time. Go to www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health for more of these ideas and get your kids' school year started off right! For more information on healthy eating, contact the Hardee County Extension Office at 507 Civic Center Drive or call 863-773-2164, or visit their website at <http://hardee.ifas.ufl.edu>.