

Preparing for Back to School

As summer winds down, it is a good time to start preparing for the upcoming school year. Back to school can be an exciting time; however, it can come be a transition for the whole family! Flexible summer days are replaced with structured school days. Preparing for back to school can involve re-introducing school routines to ease this transition, as well as preparing items such as lunch bags and backpacks. Here are a few tips to get started:

Preparing your child(ren):

- Re-establish school routines: have your child practice getting up and dressed at the same time each morning. Try having breakfast, lunch and snacks around the times that your child will eat when in school. Getting back to bedtime routines is also important; 31% of school-aged children in Canada are sleep-deprived. Ensure your child is receiving at least eight hours of sleep with up to 11 hours recommended for younger children.
- Nurture independence: speak to your child before school starts about potential responsibilities they may have in the classroom: organizing school materials, putting on footwear and getting their lunch bags.
- Create a “Launch Pad”: facilitate responsibility by designating a spot where school items like backpacks and lunch bags should always go. This helps avoid last minute scrambling in the mornings.

Another important step is planning lunch items and getting backpacks ready. This is where children can get involved. Talk to them about what they may like to see in their lunches, have them help prepare grocery lists and shop with you! Children can also help decide what should go in their backpack and where these items should be located.

Lunches:

- Purchase lunch bags and water bottles. Ensure lunch bags are large enough to include a thermos, food containers and/or ice pack. Water bottles can be the simple straw-in varieties. Water is the best option for quenching thirst with minimal mess.
- Thermos! A small food thermos is one of the best purchases you can make. Heat the thermos with boiling hot water in the morning and let sit for 12-15 minutes. Place heated food in the container. This will keep foods such as soups, stews, spaghetti and macaroni and cheese hot until lunch time.
- Variety of food containers. These are perfect for packing fruit, vegetables, crackers, cheese, sandwiches, wraps, with smaller containers used for dips and sauces. Have some of these containers pre-packed; fill with fresh fruit such as grapes and orange segments and keep them in the fridge. This can take the guess work out of making lunches and increase fruit intake!
- Prepare a number of meals and freeze them in individual servings. This process can start a couple of weeks before school begins- simply make extra for supper meals and freeze the

leftovers. Meals like soups, casseroles, stews and macaroni and cheese can last up to 2-3 months in the freezer - just be sure to date your meals before freezing!

For more tips for packing lunches, or to view the School Food Guidelines, please visit the Living Healthy Schools and Western Health – Healthy Eating websites: <http://www.livinghealthyschools.com/index.html> & <http://westernhealth.nl.ca/index.php/programs-and-services/services-a-z/nutrition-services>

Backpack:

If your child has a backpack, simply get it ready by popping it in the washer. When purchasing a new backpack, ensure that it is large enough to carry a lunch bag, school agenda and a couple of books. Ensure the backpack has a few different compartments for distribution of weight and wide straps with padding on the back and shoulders. A waist strap can also be useful for distributing weight. Consider packing the following items in the backpack:

- Antiseptic hand wash.
- Extra clothing – especially for younger children.
- Toothbrush and toothpaste.
- Splash pants – for outdoor play at recess and lunch time.
- Sneakers – Velcro are usually the best for young children.
- Extra tissues.
- Gloves/mittens and hat. Cool weather comes quickly, especially here on the West Coast! Keeping thin gloves and a hat in the backpack ensures your child is not stuck outside without the proper clothing.

Back to school can be a big transition for the whole family. A little bit of preparation can go a long way in getting everyone ready for the school year!

Kailey Pauls, RD
School Health Promotion Liaison Consultant