Brussels sprouts time!

Brussels sprouts are in season, and they’re a good source of fiber, B vitamins, and potassium. Your youngster may enjoy these cute little cabbage cousins roasted in the oven. Cut 8 oz. brussels sprouts in half, then let him toss them with 1 tsp. each olive oil and lemon juice. Bake at 400° for 25 minutes, sprinkle with grated Parmesan cheese, and bake 5 minutes more.

Walk and learn

This idea combines physical activity, learning, and family bonding. Go for walks together, perhaps after dinner or on weekend mornings. While you walk, discuss books you’re reading, give each other math problems to solve or words to spell, or have your child explain a science concept she’s learning in school.

November is the National PTAs Healthy Lifestyles Month. If your youngster’s school is participating, make plans to attend the family activities. Or celebrate on your own by squeezing in extra fitness fun—ride bikes, roller-skate, or go bowling, for example.

Just for fun

Q: Why was the refrigerator tired?

A: Because it was running all day.

Handling fast-food temptation

Does life in the fast lane mean your family winds up in the drive-thru more often than you’d like? Try these tips to work around the temptation of fast food—and help your child learn to make healthy choices in a pinch.

Tame the habit

Consider cutting back on how often you eat fast food. If you normally get it twice a week, you might drop down to once a week. Tell your youngster ahead of time so she doesn’t expect it as often. Explain that you want to eat better and that fast food is often high in fat and sodium.

Plan ahead

Let your child choose healthy snacks to keep in the car, such as nuts, rice cakes, and plain popcorn. You might also plan errands for after mealtimes, or have your youngster eat a nutritious snack at home before you head out. You’ll be less likely to stop for fast food if your family isn’t hungry.

Order carefully

If you do get fast food, choose grilled chicken rather than fried, a whole-grain bun or tortilla, and fruit or vegetable sides. Suggest that your child request toppings like mustard or extra tomato slices instead of mayonnaise or bacon. Idea: Share “sometimes” foods. Get a small order of onion rings for the whole family. Or ask for a milkshake with extra cups, and divide it up for dessert.

Make an activity pyramid

Creating and hanging up this homemade poster will motivate your youngster to fill his days with fun physical activities.

1. Have him draw a large triangle and divide it into three horizontal sections.

2. In the bottom part, he can write activities to keep him moving every day. Ideas: Play outside with friends. Jump rope. Shoot baskets.

3. In the middle section, let your child add things that take a little more time. Ideas: Organize a kickball game. Go for a hike. Visit a playground.

4. On top, he could list special-occasion or seasonal activities. Ideas: Climb a rock wall. Go sledding. Swim.

5. Suggest that he choose at least one activity from the bottom row each day, one from the middle every week, and one from the top once a month.
Read the cafeteria menu

“That sounds delicious—and nutritious!” Make a routine out of reading the school breakfast and lunch menus together to get your child excited about eating healthy foods in the cafeteria.

Talk about options. Encourage your youngster to spot familiar foods with healthier twists like pizza with turkey pepperoni or “zoodles”—spaghetti “noodles” made with zucchini. Discuss what foods is he excited to try? If items are unfamiliar to him, such as sloppy joes or chicken tetrazzini, help him look them up online so he’ll know what to expect. After he tries them, have him tell you which ones he likes best. Then, consider making them at home.

Let’s build a maze

Put an active spin on your youngster’s play by creating mazes together in different locations. Designate an entrance and an exit, and encourage your child to navigate her way out.

● Hallway. Work together to tape crisscrossing streamers or toilet paper to the walls. Your youngster can try to step over the streamers or crawl under them without breaking the “spiderweb” maze.

● Living room. Have your child use pillows, blankets, and furniture to make a maze. She might drape a blanket over the space between the coffee table and the couch to crawl under, for example.

A Thanksgiving helper

Growing up, I often joined my parents in the kitchen when they cooked, especially on holidays. I wanted my son, Chase, to be part of our Thanksgiving preparations, so last year I appointed him my kitchen helper.

I gave Chase jobs like washing fruits and vegetables, and I shared a “secret” family recipe with him. He loved hearing how my grandmother worked her magic to create delicious cranberry sauce. Together, we read her recipe, and Chase helped me make it. I even captured the moment with a photo of two smiling cooks.

At dinner, Chase was so proud when his aunt said the cranberry sauce tasted like Grandma’s. This year, he’s already asking if I have more secret recipes to teach him!

Lighter casserole

Casseroles are a go-to staple on many dinner tables. Enjoy these healthier versions of two family favorites.

Beef and rice

Cook 2 cups brown rice according to package directions. In a large skillet, brown 1 lb. lean ground beef. Drain the fat, and return to the pan along with 1 cup each chopped onion, carrot, and celery. Saute the veggies until soft, about 5 minutes. Transfer the mixture to a greased 2-qt. casserole dish and add 1 28-oz. can diced tomatoes (drained) and the rice. Sprinkle with ½ tsp. pepper, ½ tsp. salt, and ½ tsp. paprika. Bake at 350° for 20 minutes.

Tuna noodle

Boil 8 oz. whole-wheat egg noodles for 8–10 minutes. Drain, and set aside. In a bowl, mix a 10.75-oz. can reduced-fat cream of mushroom soup and ½ cup skim milk. Add a 12-oz. can tuna (packed in water, drained), 2 cups frozen peas, 6 oz. sliced fresh mushrooms, and the noodles. Pour into a greased 2-qt. casserole dish. Top with ½ cup soft whole-wheat bread crumbs, and bake at 350° for 30 minutes, until browned.

To provide busy parents with practical ways to promote healthy nutrition and physical activity for their children.

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Be Active!

Keep moving year-round! Teenagers are more likely to stay active when they see their parents getting fit, too. So gather everyone together for activities that will build muscles, get hearts pumping, and increase flexibility—month by month.

**JANUARY**

**Resolution rodeo**

Make resolutions do double duty in the new year by choosing goals that involve physical activity. Consider these ideas:

✦ Spend more time together. Suggest activities that the entire family will enjoy, such as building a snowman, ice-skating, or playing tag.

✦ Keep the house straight. Set up a weekly chores schedule with at least one active task for each person. Ideas include vacuuming, mopping, washing windows, dusting, and putting away clothes.

**FEBRUARY**

**Healthy hearts**

Show your family how much you love them by scheduling “family dates.” The only rule? No sitting still! You might try bowling or laser tag, or find an indoor pool or rock-climbing wall.

Some schools and community centers schedule a weekly open gym where your family can play basketball or volleyball. Also, some malls open early for walkers—you can take a brisk walk around on the weekend. Reward yourselves with healthy smoothies when the stores open.

If it snows, go sledding, slide down a hill in an inner tube, take a snowy hike, or go skiing or snowboarding if you live near any slopes.

**MARCH**

**Step into spring**

Look through newspaper listings for an upcoming charity walk. In the weeks leading up to the event, train together. You can clock a route through your neighborhood with your car's odometer, or use the track at your child's school (four laps usually equal a mile). Walk the route as a family, increasing your distance until you work up to the mileage you'll be doing.

Even if you don't sign up for an organized walk, you can make after-dinner strolls a family ritual. Or create a neighborhood walking club, and invite other families who have a child your youngster's age to join you in getting fit together.

**APRIL**

**Unplugged fun**

Screen-Free Week is held every spring. Use it as an opportunity to give your child alternatives to television and video games (croquet, hide-and-seek, planting flowers). Focus on helping her find a special activity that she can continue even after the week is over.

You could encourage your teenager to revisit an old hobby—did she take gymnastics or play softball when she was younger? Maybe she could volunteer at a recreation center or with a youth league that teaches these sports to little ones.

**MAY**

**Workout weekends**

Wake up to family workouts. Get everyone up 10 minutes earlier (set alarm clocks, put on music), and start the day with quick exercises. Try these 10-minute workout ideas: Do jumping jacks, run up and down the stairs, practice cheerleading jumps, or play trash-can basketball with wadded-up paper.

If it's hard to motivate your teenager to get out of bed, offer an incentive (for instance, a weekend of early workouts earns a trip to the bowling alley or an extra turn with the car).

**JUNE**

**Daylight saving**

Take advantage of the longest days of the year by getting outside as much as possible. Here are several ideas to get your family moving:

✦ Enjoy a bike ride or a hike along a scenic trail. Wear backpacks, and take along a healthy picnic.

✦ Fly kites. Have one for each person so everyone keeps moving.

✦ Do outdoor chores. Mow the lawn, wash the car, or weed the garden.

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**JULY**

**Water play**

On a hot day, there’s no place better than a pool! Encourage your teen to join the local swim team—practices and meets will provide plenty of exercise. Also, check your local parks and recreation department for classes in water aerobics or synchronized swimming.

Your child might also consider working toward a lifeguard certification. See if your community pool offers a course, or visit the American Red Cross website (www.redcross.org) to find nearby lifeguard classes. Once your teen is certified, he could be hired as a lifeguard, help coach the younger kids’ swim team, or even give swimming lessons.

**AUGUST**

**Pickup games**

Organize your own neighborhood kickball or flag football league. Try to find two or three other families who are interested in a weekly game at the school field. You can break into teams of eight or more players (have about the same number of adults, teens, and younger children on each side).

*Other ideas:* Suggest that your child get a group to play street hockey on the school blacktop. Shoot hoops with your kids at the school or community center basketball court. Or hit tennis balls at a public court.

**SEPTEMBER**

**Family exercise challenge**

Does your child participate in physical fitness testing at school? You can set up your own family “test” at home. Pick a date at the end of the month, and encourage everyone to prepare by stretching, running, and doing push-ups and sit-ups. During your family challenge, keep track of scores and times in activities like these:

- Stand with your hands against a wall, and see how many “standing” push-ups you can do.
- Put a hula hoop around your waist, and keep it going as long as possible.
- Throw a ball against a wall, and catch it as many times as you can.
- Do as many sit-ups as possible in one minute.

**OCTOBER**

**Fall for fitness**

Taking part in fall traditions will give the whole family a workout. Rake leaves or work in your garden. Before the ground freezes, plant bulbs (tulips, daffodils, crocuses) that will bloom in the spring. If you don’t have a garden, you and your teen can volunteer to help with planting at a school or nursing home.

Another fun activity is to go to a local orchard to pick apples, and see who can fill a basket the fastest. Younger teens and preteens will still get a kick out of running through a corn maze, jumping on bales of hay, and making scarecrows at fall farm festivals.

**NOVEMBER**

**You’re on camera!**

Stay fit indoors as the weather cools off by filming your own family exercise video. If you don’t have a video camera, borrow one from a relative or neighbor.

Start with a warm-up of slow stretches, and cool down at the end with more stretches. (For ideas, borrow a workout video from the library.) In between, have each family member choose a favorite aerobic exercise. Your son might do a drill he learned in football practice, or your daughter might have picked up a new move from dance class. Each person can teach the exercise to the rest of the family.

After practicing a few times together, you’re ready to tape. You’ll get plenty of exercise just preparing! Once the video is made, the whole family can use it to work out.

**DECEMBER**

**Active gift giving**

Give your family presents that encourage them to get moving.

A new pair of sneakers or hiking boots might motivate your youngster to take up running or walking. Consider a family gift of a YMCA membership so everyone can go to the gym or take sports and fitness classes. Or give your teen sports equipment, such as a basketball, inline skates, or a mountain bike.

*Another idea:* Get pedometers for everyone, and have a daily contest to see who can walk the most steps!

*Editor’s Note:* Teen Food & Fitness™ is reviewed by a registered dietitian. Consult a physician before beginning any major change in diet or exercise.
Family Cooking = Learning Fun!

The kitchen is more than a place to cook and eat—it can also be a fun “classroom” for your children. Planning and preparing healthy meals together is a great way to build reading, math, and science skills. Plus, your kids will enjoy eating the results of their “lessons”!

Planning meals

Read cookbooks
Browse through cookbooks or food blogs together, looking at the pictures and reading healthy recipes aloud to each other. You’ll find new recipes and foods, and your child will get reading practice. Encourage her to look up unfamiliar words (sift, thyme) in the cookbook glossary or in a dictionary. Earmark recipes to try, and have your youngster make shopping lists—she’ll work on writing, spelling, and organization. Idea: Check out cookbooks at the library. The librarian can suggest ones geared toward children.

Write a weekly meal plan
What’s for dinner this week? Let your child help you decide on a meal for each evening that includes protein, whole grains, vegetables, fruit, and dairy. For instance, say your Sunday meal will be salmon with sweet potatoes and brussels sprouts. Ask him what’s missing (grains, fruit, and dairy) and what foods could fill in the gap (brown rice and a side salad of blueberries and feta cheese). Have him make a weekly meals calendar to post in your kitchen.

Shop for deals
Show your youngster how you use math to save money at the grocery store and make decisions about what to buy. Before leaving home, let her look through grocery ads for coupons and sale items. Have her suggest items for your list based on what she sees. Then as you shop, help her figure out the best deals. You might say, “If frozen asparagus is regularly $2.50, but now it’s $4 for two bags, how much would we save by buying two bags?” ($1, because 2 x $2.50 = $5, and $5 – $4 = $1.) Or tell her to compare the per-pound price of whole chicken, chicken parts, and boneless, skinless chicken breasts. What’s the difference in price?

continued
Create a family cookbook
Let your child put together a cookbook filled with healthy recipes for your family. You could start by brainstorming ways to make his favorite meals more nutritious (add pureed butternut squash to macaroni and cheese, switch to whole-grain spaghetti). Have your youngster write and illustrate a revised recipe for each dish and put the sheets into a three-ring binder. Or help him make connections to what he’s learning in school by finding recipes that relate. If he’s studying Greece, he can add a recipe for spanakopita (spinach pie), or if he’s learning Chinese, he might look for stir-fries. Tip: Encourage your child to be creative by coming up with his own recipes or adding twists to ones he finds.

Preparing meals
Measure ingredients
Cooking is a natural way to practice measuring. Try putting your youngster in charge of measuring ingredients when you cook. Have him experiment with different sizes of measuring cups and spoons to discover that 3 tsp. = 1 tbsp. or 2 cups = 1 pint. Also, pose math problems as you go: “This recipe calls for $\frac{1}{2}$ cup chicken broth. We’re doubling the recipe—how much broth do we need?” ($\frac{1}{2}$ cup x 2 = 1 cup.) Idea: Suggest substitutions or easy changes to make recipes healthier. For instance, he could use less sugar in a pancake recipe (say, $\frac{1}{3}$ cup instead of $\frac{1}{2}$ cup), and see if he notices a difference in the taste.

See healthy fractions
Instead of serving your child’s food, let her dish it out herself. That way, she can learn the healthiest way to fill her plate—and see fractions in action. First, go to choosemyplate.gov and talk about what fraction of the colorful plate each food group takes up: Vegetables and fruit cover $\frac{1}{2}$ of the plate, grains a little over $\frac{1}{4}$, and protein just under $\frac{1}{4}$. Then, have your youngster practice using fractions at meal time. She could put peas and melon slices on $\frac{1}{2}$ of her plate, brown rice on $\frac{1}{4}$, and chicken on the last $\frac{1}{4}$. Ask her to say the number sentence she just made ($\frac{1}{2} + \frac{1}{4} + \frac{1}{4} = 1$).

Bake and experiment
What makes muffins and cookies rise? Your youngster can explore the science of baking with this experiment. First, find a healthy muffin recipe to try—one that includes whole-wheat flour and applesauce rather than oil is ideal. Help him make half the batch with baking soda and half without. What happens? (The ones without baking soda will turn out flat.) Explain that baking soda combines with other ingredients to produce air bubbles—and these tiny pockets of air allow the muffins to rise. Idea: Illustrate this idea simply with water, vinegar, and baking soda. Have your child fill a cup halfway with water, stir in 2 tsp. baking soda, and slowly add 2 tbsp. vinegar. He’ll see firsthand the bubbles that are created.

Make your own ice cream
Here’s a cool, tasty way for your youngster to whip up a batch of healthier ice cream while learning about states of matter. Help her put 1 cup milk, 1 tsp. sugar, and 1 tsp. vanilla into a quart-sized plastic freezer bag. She should tightly seal the bag, gently pressing out the air, and put that bag in a second freezer bag, sealing and pressing that one carefully as well. Next, have her add ice cubes to a large empty can with a lid (for example, a coffee can) to fill it halfway. Sprinkle the ice with 1 tbsp. salt. Then, she should place the bag inside the can, snap on the lid, and roll the can back and forth vigorously for 15 minutes.
When she opens the bags, she’ll see ice cream! Explain that the very cold ice (the salt lowers the freezing point) turned the liquid mixture into a solid. And it’s healthier than store-bought versions that have more sugar and fat.

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