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Back to School – Pack a Lunch with a Healthy Punch!

New York City, NY – Ready or not, school is here! While kids gear up to start a new school year, it's time for parents and caregivers to study up on healthy, nutritious lunches and after school snacks.

City Harvest, the world's first and New York City's only food rescue program, is revving up for another healthy school year, offering quick, simple, and affordable solutions to help parents pack a lunch with a healthy punch. Now in its 25th year tackling poverty, nutrition, and obesity across the five boroughs, the agency emerged as a leader in nutrition education with the 2004 launch of Fruit Bowl, which supplies fresh fruit, milk and 100% juice to more than 1,400 New York City school children.

“Eating healthy foods throughout the day helps children stay energized and focused. The key to making smart food choices is to make them easy. By planning and preparing healthy snacks, kids will be less tempted to reach for chips, candy and sodas,” says Sarah Pearlman, Manager of Childhood Nutrition at City Harvest.

Following these easy, affordable tips will keep kids eating healthy and living healthy:

Lunch Time Tips

- Try introducing these nutritious choices into your child's lunchtime routine:
 - * Water, a can of vegetable juice, or 1% milk
 - * Whole wheat bread, bagels, pita pockets or tortilla wraps
 - * Individual servings of fresh fruit or applesauce
 - * Low-fat yogurt or cheese
 - * Lean meats like turkey, chicken, ham, or roast beef
 - * Graham crackers, granola, fig bars, or trail mix
 - * Hummus or bean dip
- Studies show that kids are more likely to eat what you pack if they are involved in the process.
- Let your child choose from a few different healthy options; kids will enjoy the freedom of making their own decisions.
- Create lunchtime menus together; having a clear plan makes packing even easier.
- Don't overlook leftovers. Pack up what is left from tonight's dinner for an easy out-the-door lunch tomorrow.
- Surprise them with a special treat every once in a while.

- Take the work out of lunch. A child is more likely to eat an orange that has already been cut and peeled.

Power Up with a Healthy After-school Snack

Healthy snacking in between meals and after school offers children nutrients they need to grow and stay healthy. Here are some snacking strategies that you can incorporate into your daily routine that will save you time and money. Keep in mind that children have small stomachs; it's important they eat small meals frequently throughout the day.

- Keep snacks accessible. Leave a stash of washed, ready-to-eat fresh fruit on the counter and healthy snacks such as raw veggies, low-fat yogurt, string cheese, and 100% juice on the lower levels of the refrigerator.
- Post a list of snack ideas on the refrigerator door to help kids learn to make healthy choices on their own.
- Have kids on the go? To save time, prepare plastic bags of pretzels, whole-grain cereals, or nuts. Stash them in backpacks, in the car, or even in the pantry.
- Keep snacking interesting. Try to challenge your kids to try new foods. Pair an old favorite with something new and they will be more likely to try it.
- Combine snacks from at least two food groups to pack more nutrients into your child's diet.
- Be creative and satisfy cravings with healthier alternatives. Try a hot chocolate drink made with low-fat milk instead of a candy bar or snack on baked tortilla chips instead of potato chips.

Media notes: Experts are available for interviews. Additional resources and recipes from Fruit Bowl to help parents make the school year healthy and affordable can be found at: www.cityharvest.org.