Nutrition and Learning: What’s the connection?

Nutritionally fit children are more likely to have energy, stamina and self-esteem, all of which improve their ability to learn.

Hunger affects learning
- Good nutrition is essential for learning to occur.
- Many different nutrients are needed to keep the brain working.

Hungry children are:
- Irritable, grouchy
- Not interested in learning
- Nervous, timid, passive
- Unable to concentrate

Poorly nourished children are:
- Less physically active
- Less curious
- Less attentive
- Less independent
- Less social
- More uneasy or nervous

Good nutrition and learning go hand in hand
- The body needs quality food to power mental ability.
- Good nutrition is key to a healthy lifestyle.
- Children who make healthy food choices tend to make better food choices as adults.

Refuel with lunch midday
- School meals can meet about one-third of a child’s nutrition needs.
- Pack a lunch to bring to school.
  Good lunch bag choices include:
  - Sandwiches
  - Raw vegetables
  - String cheese
  - Whole-grain crackers
  - Fruit
  - Low-fat yogurt or pudding
- Use an ice pack to keep cold foods safe.

Start the day with breakfast
- Children who eat breakfast do better in school.
- Skipping breakfast leaves the brain without fuel.
- Try these nutrient-packed breakfast ideas:
  - Whole-grain cereal topped with fruit and low-fat milk
  - Low-fat yogurt topped with granola and fruit
  - Breakfast smoothie made with low-fat milk and your favorite fruit
  - Leftovers from last night’s dinner

Get an after-school boost
- Healthy after-school snacks supplied needed nutrients.
- Stock up with:
  - Ready-to-eat fruits and vegetables
  - Whole-grain crackers and low-fat cheese
  - Popcorn
  - Whole-grain cereal
  - Low-fat milk and yogurt

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For more information, call MU Extension’s Show Me Nutrition line at 1-888-515-0016.
Running out of money for food? Contact your local Food Stamp office or go online to dss.mo.gov/fsd/fstamp.