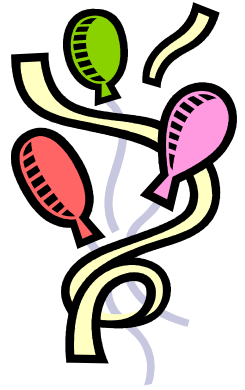


# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HEALTHY CELEBRATIONS AT SCHOOL

We all love to celebrate birthdays in class, especially our own children's; however, we have to remember that our goal is to provide our children with foods of Maximum Nutritional Value on a regular basis. Although birthdays come only once a year, there may be 25 or more "celebrations" in class during the school year, plus celebrations of Valentines Day, Halloween, and other holidays. Typically, foods for school celebrations include cupcakes, candy, cookies, and soda. So what is the harm? There is nothing wrong with an occasional treat, but unhealthy choices have become the norm rather than the exception. Parties and treats used as classroom rewards, food fundraisers, and snacks available at school stores constantly expose children to high-fat, high-sugar, low-nutrient choices.



## BUT IT'S ONLY A CUPCAKE.....



Childhood obesity is one of our nation's leading threats. There are over 12 million children who are already at risk of becoming overweight or are overweight. More children than ever before are developing conditions that you would normally see in adults, such as type-2 diabetes, high cholesterol, and high blood pressure. Constant exposure to low-nutrient foods makes it difficult for children to learn how to make healthy food choices.

## Benefits of Healthy Celebrations

- **Healthy Kids Learn Better:** Research clearly demonstrates that good nutrition is linked to better behavior and academic performance. To provide the best possible learning environment for children, parents should assist schools in providing an environment that supports healthy behaviors.
- **Provides Consistent Messages:** Providing healthy classroom celebrations demonstrates a school commitment to promoting healthy behaviors. It supports the classroom lessons students are learning about health, instead of contradicting them. Healthy celebrations promote positive lifestyle choices to reduce student health risks and improve learning.
- **Creates Excitement About Nutrition:** Children are excited about new and different things, including fun party activities and healthy snacks. School staff and parents need not worry that children will be disappointed if typical party foods are not served in the classroom.
- **Protects Children with Food Allergies:** When parents send in food, it is difficult to ensure the safety of children with food allergies. You can help protect children with food allergies by providing non-food celebrations.
- **Puts Food in Its Proper Place:** Refreshments should complement the fun, not become the "main event."

# WHAT PARENTS CAN DO



Parents can help schools promote a healthy learning environment by providing healthy celebrations that shift the focus from the food to the child. Send in a game or craft that the children can make. If you are sending in food, make it count with healthy choices! You can even incorporate a fun nutrition lesson by involving your child when planning and preparing the healthy snacks. On the next page you will find some ideas for fun activities and healthy foods for school parties and other celebrations. For more ideas and links to information visit <http://nutrition.dadeschools.net>.

## HEALTHY FOOD IDEAS



- Fruit smoothies (blend berries, bananas, and pineapple)
- Fresh fruit assortment (e.g. fruit and cheese kabobs, fruit salad, or fruit with low-fat whipped topping)
- Dried fruit (e.g., raisins, cranberries, apricots, banana chips), 100% fruit snacks
- Low-fat or nonfat plain or flavored milk, 100% juice and water
- Vegetable trays with low-fat dip, celery and carrots with peanut butter, and raisins
- Whole grain crackers with low-fat cheese cubes or low-fat string cheese
- Pretzels, low-fat or air popped popcorn, rice cakes
- Angel food cake, plain or topped with fresh fruit
- Low-fat pudding, low-fat yogurt, low-fat yogurt parfaits or banana splits (e.g., yogurt and fruit topped with cereal, granola, or crushed graham crackers)
- Baked tortilla chips with salsa or bean dip
- Trail/cereal mix (e.g., whole-grain, low-sugar cereals mixed with dried fruits, pretzels) - See the recipe on the next page.
- Fresh fruit with low fat yogurt dipping sauce - See the recipe on the last page.
- Hummus with whole grain crackers or pretzels

## ACTIVITIES TO CELEBRATE THE CHILD

- Plan special party games and activities. Provide game supplies, pencils, erasers, stickers, and other small school supplies instead of food.
- Work with the teacher to see if children can be given extra recess time instead of a class party. See if the birthday child can choose and lead an active game for everyone.
- Instead of food, purchase a book for the classroom or school library in your child's name. Go to school with your child and read the book to the class.



- Instead of a party, organize a special community service project, e.g., invite Senior Citizens to eat in the cafeteria with your child's class, make "curechiefs" for chemotherapy patients and blankets for rescue dogs.
- Bring in materials and ask the class to create a "Celebrate Me" book. Have the celebrant's classmates write stories or poems and draw pictures to describe what is special about the birthday child.

When bringing any food into the school environment make sure to ascertain if any of the children have food allergies.

Adapted with permission from *Healthy Celebrations*, Connecticut State Department of Education, May 2005 (Revised February 2007). <http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/cwp/view.asp?a=2626&q=320754#Resources>

# HEALTHY HOLIDAYS

## September

SET THE RIGHT TONE FOR THIS YEAR'S PARTIES.  
KEEP IN MIND THESE HEALTHY PARTY TIPS:

- Celebrate without food; shift the focus from food to fun.
- Limit each party to include no more than one junk-food item.
- Create a healthy snack list and have parents sign up to bring in an item from the list: see, [http://cspinet.org/new/pdf/school\\_snacks.pdf](http://cspinet.org/new/pdf/school_snacks.pdf)



## November

### THANKSGIVING

- Have students write or draw a picture about what they are thankful for and share it with the class.
- Create a garland of gratitude. Cut leaf shapes out of construction paper and then crinkle them up to create the lines in a leaf. Flatten them out and have children write what they are grateful for. Use a piece of string and tape the stem of the leaf over the string. Display the garland in class.
- Do a service project as a class field trip.

#### Healthy Party Snacks:

- Turkey roll ups
- Spread apple butter on whole grain English muffins or graham crackers.
- Serve warm apple cider.
- Pumpkin dip (see recipe below)



### PUMPKIN DIP

(from the Dannon Institute)

#### Mix the following ingredients:

- 3 T canned pumpkin
  - 1 c low-fat vanilla yogurt
  - 1 T orange juice concentrate (use 100% juice)
  - ½ tsp. of cinnamon (optional)
  - 1 T maple syrup (optional)
- Dip in with graham crackers**



## October

### HALLOWEEN

Kids will get plenty of candy trick-or-treating. Try to keep the focus on fun at school.

- **Focus on the costumes!** Have a parade or costume contest.
- Instead of candy, try small toys: (e.g., temporary tattoos, stickers, small plastic spiders or ghosts, spooky plastic rings, or false teeth).
- Decorate pillowcases or bags for trick-or-treating.

#### Healthy Party Snacks:

- Serve kiwi (cut in half and serve with a spoon).
  - Apple Cider
  - Apples with caramel or yogurt dip
  - Pumpkin dip and graham crackers (see recipe below)
  - Roasted pumpkin seeds
  - Snack cups of canned peaches or mandarin oranges (canned in juice or light syrup)
  - Oranges, cantaloupe, tangerines, mangos, or dried peaches
  - Carrots with low-fat ranch dressing
- Use Halloween cookie cutters to make sandwiches or fruit look frightfully delicious!

## December/January

### WINTER HOLIDAYS



- Have students make holiday cards for nursing home residents or decorate pillow cases to give to a homeless shelter.
- Go caroling and sing for other classes or at a senior center.
- Decorate the classroom with a winter theme (e.g., snowflakes, snowmen, or snow angels)
- Collect personal care products and prepare kits for a homeless shelter or take a service project field trip to visit a nursing home, homeless shelter, or a food bank.
- Make snow globes out of baby food jars and white glitter or plastic snowflakes. Fill them with water until a half inch is left at the top (use a hot glue gun to seal the lid).

#### Healthy Party Snacks:

- Hollow out red and green peppers and fill them with a dip such as low-fat ranch, hummus, or guacamole and serve with vegetables.
- Make fruit kabobs and alternate red and green grapes or red/green apples.
- Serve green beans, broccoli, and tomatoes with a low-fat dip.

### TASTY TRAIL MIX

#### Mix the following ingredients:

- 1 c dried fruit
  - ½ c raisins
  - 1 c Wheat Chex cereal
  - 1 c Cheerios
  - 2 c of pretzel sticks
- Serve in individual containers or let children scoop their own from a bowl**

# HEALTHY HOLIDAYS

## February



### VALENTINE'S DAY

- Have students write down one positive comment about each classmate, (e.g., "You're a good friend." "You have a nice smile." or "You are fun."); pass them out.
- Create a Valentine's Day card holder. (Cut a paper plate in half, have children paint or color the plate and write their name on it. Use a hole punch to cut holes around the bottom curve of the plate. Stitch the two halves together with colorful ribbon or string. Make a handle with the string so children can hang them at their desk).

### Healthy Party Snacks:

- Serve cherry tomatoes and red peppers with hummus or ranch dressing.
- Serve strawberries, raspberries, dried cranberries, red grapes, pomegranate, or apple slices.
- Make very-berry pink smoothies (see smoothie recipe below and use strawberries for the fruit)



## April/May

### SPRING PARTY

- Plan a nature walk to see plants re-awakening in the spring weather.
- Decorate plastic eggs with paints, glitter, and stickers and put physical activity messages on the inside (e.g., hop on one leg 5 times or do 6 jumping jacks). Have an egg hunt and kids can act on the messages.
- Decorate flower pots for parents and plant a flower or seed.
- Have parents donate plants that children can plant in the school yard or at a housing project, senior center, or other community site.

### Healthy Party Snacks:

- Carrot muffins
- Carrots with hummus or a low-fat ranch dressing
- Berries with Cool Whip
- Fruit smoothies (see recipe below)

### BASIC SMOOTHIE

Ingredients:  
 ½ to 1 c fresh or frozen fruit  
 1 c plain non-fat yogurt  
 ½ c fruit juice

About 4 ice cubes or use frozen fruit and skip the ice  
 Directions: Combine all ingredients in a blender and process on high until ice is crushed and the mixture is smooth and creamy

## March



### ST. PATRICK'S DAY

- Teach an Irish step dance.
- Decorate the room with shamrocks made from construction paper.
- Plan a St. Patrick's Day scavenger hunt that leads to a pot of gold filled with treasures, (e.g., markers, pens, pencils, and/or erasers).
- Read about Irish history or a story about St. Patrick.

### Healthy Party Snacks:

#### Make it a "Green" Day.

- Serve kiwi (cut in half and serve with a spoon).
- Serve cucumbers, celery sticks, broccoli, sugar snap peas, green beans, or green peppers with hummus or a low-fat dressing such as ranch or thousand island.
- Serve whole grain tortilla chips with guacamole.
- Try edamame (pronounced "eh-dah-Mah-may"). It is fun to eat and easy to serve.



## June

With the end of school come numerous celebrations. Keep the focus away from food and plan activities to highlight the end of the school year and the coming of summer.

- Fresh produce is easier to come by in summer. Talk about fruits from around the world and discuss where they originated.
- Have a tasting party with star fruit, papaya, mango, kiwi, guava, and/or pineapple.
- Visit a local farm, garden, or orchard to learn about fruits and vegetables that grow in your area.
- Have children make a collage or write a story about what they plan to do over the summer.
- Have students write stories or put together items that remind them of the past school year; have students take them home.
- Plan an outdoor game/activity to enjoy the warmer weather.

### FRUIT DIP

Ingredients:  
 ½ c vanilla low-fat yogurt  
 1 tsp. honey  
 ¼ tsp. cinnamon  
 ¼ tsp. nutmeg

Directions: Mix ingredients together until blended.  
 Serve with your favorite fruits!