



BUILDING A BALANCED *Lunchbox*





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MANY PARENTS MAKE THE DECISION TO PACK THEIR CHILD'S LUNCH TO AVOID LESS NUTRITIOUS OPTIONS IN THE SCHOOL LUNCH LINE, OR TO ENSURE THEY HAVE ENOUGH FOODS THEY LIKE (AND WILL ACTUALLY EAT). THE ENERGY CONTENT AND BALANCE OF NUTRIENTS IN A CHILD'S LUNCH IS IMPORTANT NOT ONLY FOR PHYSICAL AND MENTAL DEVELOPMENT, BUT ALSO TO ENSURE YOUR CHILD ISN'T OVERLY HUNGRY AFTER SCHOOL AND AT THE END OF THE DAY.

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SETTING YOUR CHILD UP FOR SUCCESS

It's important at any age to consume energy before your body and mind need to use it. Breakfast is the first opportunity to ensure the body has what it needs for the day and a mid-morning snack is essential to supplying energy to kids' cells that constantly need fuel. Since students have "lunch" at school any time between 10:30 and 1:30, the time they snack may vary or be nonexistent. This is why packing a balanced meal for school lunch is imperative in promoting an active mind and body and preventing excessive hunger later in the day.

TIP

Involve your kids in the lunchbox prep process. Let them pick out vegetables and fruit they like, let them help you cook, add a honey packet to add to their yogurt.



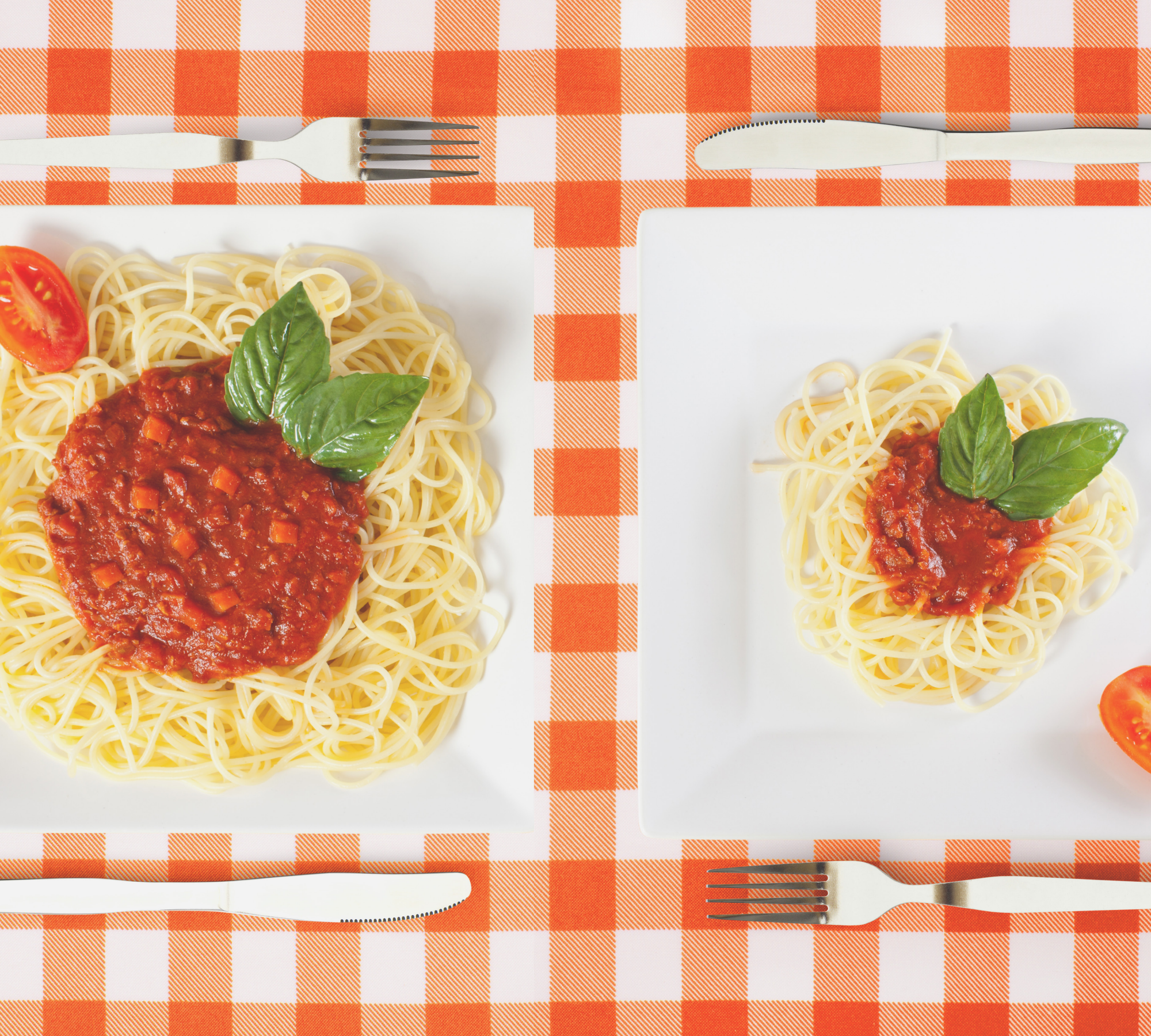
MENTAL SHARPNESS

Even a slight bit of hunger can leave a child distracted from their studies and impact retention of new knowledge and ultimate performance in school. It can also leave them low on energy, driving mental productivity down and reducing activity in PE classes or recess.

Low energy and productivity from lack of nutritious food makes it more likely for the body to crave refined flours and sugars after school as a quick way to get energy to their cells that are feeling deprived. It can also lead to overeating at dinner time and before bed.

TIP

Make nutritious snack time after school fun and interactive with nutritious, energy-giving food so they don't opt for processed. Set up a fruit and veggie bar with all-natural dips, like honey, to give them the power to choose how they fuel their body.



PORTION SIZES

While it's okay for kids to eat a larger dinner or still need a night time snack on occasion, if it becomes a normal pattern, it may impact their quality of sleep and decrease their desire to eat earlier in the day when their body needs the energy. Portion sizes will vary for your child depending on their age, size, genetics, activity level, and whether a growth spurt is around the corner.

TIP

It's always better to offer your kid(s) a little bit more than they may need and allow your child to trust their body to let them know what to eat and when to stop. Help set them up for lifelong success of intuitive eating.

LUNCHBOX CHECK LIST:



- ✓ **PROTEIN** – Their growing bodies need this nutrient, but so do their tummies so they feel full from their meals. Think past lunchmeat! Plant based lunch proteins are great from a food safety standpoint. Try edamame, beans, lentils, tofu, tempeh, or a bean burger. Hard boiled eggs and proteins from last night's dinner are another option to avoid lunchmeat additives.



- ✓ **STARCH** – The brain uses substantial amounts of carbohydrate for fuel, as does your child's active body. Whole grain pasta, rice, farro, quinoa, corn, whole grain bread, tortillas, and crackers are all healthful options.



- ✓ **VEGETABLE** – Whether raw or cooked, work with your child to select veggies for the week to increase the likelihood of consumption. When they feel they had some control of the meal, they're excited to eat it!



- ✓ **FRUIT** – Most kids enjoy fruit and it provides energy and antioxidants to fuel their physical and mental development. They can choose if they eat it at snack time or lunch based on their cravings and preferences each day.



- ✓ **DAIRY, DAIRY ALTERNATIVE, NUTS OR SEEDS** – As a percent of energy eaten, kids require more dietary fat than adults. Full fat dairy or nut-based dairy alternatives provide this nutrient plus vitamins, minerals and protein. Nuts or seeds can do the same and you can sweeten yogurts and nut or seed butters with honey to increase liking.



- ✓ **TREAT** – When we don't deprive kids (or ourselves) of treats, they are more likely to enjoy them when they want them and less likely to overeat on sweets when they're available. Homemade honey-sweetened cookies, muffins, and energy bites are a fun option here.

- Kelly Jones MS, RD, CSSD, LDN



Thy Word is sweeter than honey. Ps. 119:103



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