

# Healthy, Happy School Holiday Celebrations!

Let's put a new spin on the holidays, which aren't usually synonymous with being healthy. School celebrations can be fun *and good for us*.

## There are many benefits to healthy celebrations<sup>1</sup>:

- ▶ **Healthy kids learn better:** Research shows that good nutrition is linked to better behavior and academic performance for students.
- ▶ **Consistent messaging promotes a healthy school environment:** Shows students the benefits of positive lifestyles and aligns with classroom lessons on being healthy.
- ▶ **Parties create excitement about nutrition:** Allows students to try new things in a fun environment.
- ▶ **Planning protects children with food allergies:** Non-food celebrations eliminate the threat of allergic reactions from foods brought in by students. And, healthy food sign-up sheets help control items entering the classroom for snacks when food is involved.



## Here are some ideas to help you get started with healthy celebrations in your school:

### Tasty Treats can be Healthy and Fun!

- ☆ List only healthy items on the party sign-up sheets for parents, to ensure that unhealthy options are limited or eliminated.<sup>2</sup>
- ☆ Involve students in choosing food for the celebration – vote on options, explain why certain things are healthy and others are not.
- ☆ Focus on at most one party per class, per month, and limit any unhealthy foods to one item per party.<sup>2</sup>
- ☆ Use ChooseMyPlate.gov to include foods from all food groups in your party.<sup>3</sup>
- ☆ Make sure students have eaten a healthy meal before the celebration or party, so they don't overeat when it comes to party snacks.<sup>4</sup>
- ☆ Schedule parties in the afternoon, after lunch.
- ☆ Give students water, 100% fruit juice or low-fat milk to quench their thirst.<sup>5</sup>
- ☆ Trail mix, fruit parfaits, whole grain crackers, low-fat cheese and frozen fruit make great snacks!
- ☆ Use cookie cutters with younger students to make fun shapes out of foods that can be cut up.<sup>5</sup>
- ☆ Taste test healthy foods/fruits/veggies and let kids vote on the best ones.<sup>2</sup> You can even make it a blind taste test, where students are blindfolded and have to guess what they are tasting (be sure there are no food allergies before the taste test). The winner receives a non-food prize.



- ☆ Plan a variety of colors/shapes/textures to make edible art as part of the fun. (Ex. Make a Halloween ghost with half a banana and raisins or chocolate chips for the eyes/mouth or a pumpkin with peeled clementine oranges and celery for the stem.)

## Non-Food Celebration Ideas

- ☆ Coordinate with the gym or go outside for fun activities like hula hooping or kickball competitions.<sup>6</sup>
- ☆ A scavenger hunt around the school will get students thinking and moving. It can be themed for the appropriate holiday or season. Make sure the reward isn't unhealthy – award the winners with something like a treasure chest full of items like pencils, stickers, bookmarks, free homework passes, temporary tattoos or other non-food related prizes.<sup>5,2</sup>
- ☆ A themed parade is always fun for younger students –align the theme with the holiday or season.<sup>5</sup>
- ☆ Games and crafts are usually a hit with students, and easily adjusted to reflect what is being celebrated.<sup>5</sup>
- ☆ Try not to have the party while seated - get students up and moving! Students can make short plays about the reason for the celebration, participate in extra recess time, or rotate from different activity stations.<sup>4,2</sup>
- ☆ Have students partake in a community service project to benefit others in the community as a celebration of the holiday.<sup>1</sup>



Remember that students often celebrate at home as well, so use the classroom holiday party as an opportunity to model healthy parties.<sup>2,3</sup> When planning, check out any school policies regarding wellness or food in your school/classrooms. The USDA [Smart Snacks guidelines](#)<sup>7</sup> and [Alliance for a Healthier Generation's product calculator](#)<sup>8</sup> can help identify healthier options.

**Need holiday/season/birthday specific party ideas, including snacks, recipes, activities and goodies?** Two great resources are [the Center for Science in the Public Interest's Healthy School Celebrations](#)<sup>2</sup> and [the Coalition for Activity and Nutrition to Defeat Obesity's Healthy School Celebrations](#)<sup>9</sup>.

## Together, we can Bag the Junk in schools!

### Ideas adapted from:

<sup>1</sup> Connecticut State Department of Education, *Healthy Celebrations: Promoting a Healthy School Environment* ([http://healthymeals.nal.usda.gov/hsmrs/Connecticut/CT%20Healthy\\_Celebrations.pdf](http://healthymeals.nal.usda.gov/hsmrs/Connecticut/CT%20Healthy_Celebrations.pdf))

<sup>2</sup> Center for Science in the Public Interest, *Healthy School Celebrations* ([http://cspinet.org/new/pdf/healthy\\_school\\_celebrations.pdf](http://cspinet.org/new/pdf/healthy_school_celebrations.pdf))

<sup>3</sup> USDA Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion, *Make Celebrations Fun, Healthy & Active - 10 Tips to Creating Healthy, Active Events* ([www.choosemyplate.gov/sites/default/files/tentips/DGTipsheet20MakeCelebrations.pdf](http://www.choosemyplate.gov/sites/default/files/tentips/DGTipsheet20MakeCelebrations.pdf))

<sup>4</sup> Center for Science in the Public Interest, *Ghoulishly Great Ideas for Halloween Parties & Trick-or-Treating* ([www.cspinet.org/new/pdf/halloween.pdf](http://www.cspinet.org/new/pdf/halloween.pdf))

<sup>5</sup> Alliance for a Healthier Generation, *Healthy Celebrations, Let's Celebrate!* ([www.healthiergeneration.org/asset/nvgd8g/13-6162\\_HSPHealthyCelebration.pdf](http://www.healthiergeneration.org/asset/nvgd8g/13-6162_HSPHealthyCelebration.pdf))

<sup>6</sup> Alliance for a Healthier Generation, *8 Smart Snack Celebrations* ([www.healthiergeneration.org/news\\_events/2014/05/13/926/8\\_smart\\_snack\\_celebrations](http://www.healthiergeneration.org/news_events/2014/05/13/926/8_smart_snack_celebrations))

<sup>7</sup> NEA Healthy Futures, *Bag the Junk: Smart Snacks Guidelines* (<http://neahealthyfutures.org/wpcproduct/bag-the-junk-smart-snacks-guidelines/>)

<sup>8</sup> Alliance for a Healthier Generation Alliance Product Calculator (<https://foodplanner.healthiergeneration.org/calculator/>)

<sup>9</sup> Coalition for Activity and Nutrition to Defeat Obesity, *Healthy School Celebrations* ([www.greeleyschools.org/cms/lib2/CO01001723/Centricity/Domain/3682/HKC%20Classroom%20Party%20Book.pdf](http://www.greeleyschools.org/cms/lib2/CO01001723/Centricity/Domain/3682/HKC%20Classroom%20Party%20Book.pdf))