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March is National Nutrition Month



Nutrition is not a chore. At least, it shouldn't be. Keeping your family healthy can be as fun as planting your own vegetable patch, riding bikes in the park or creating a meal together. This month we are offering you tips to make nutrition part of your everyday life. Small changes can make huge differences. All it takes is a little push in the right direction.

Stay Active. Stay Healthy!

Physical activity is one of the keys to a healthy lifestyle. While sitting in front of a television or computer can keep kids entertained, there is no real substitute for playing outside.

There are so many outdoor options for families, especially here in South Florida. Splashing around in the pool or heading to the beach are two fun ways to keep cool and fit in the heat. If you don't have a pool at home, try finding a community center with one. The [YMCA](#) has a [map](#) with a list of options.

Local parks are also a great place to spend the day. Pack up the car with a healthy picnic, and spend the day playing your favorite sports. You can also bring your bikes along and check out local trails.

By taking part in outdoor activities, you will be improving your family's endurance, ensuring cardiovascular health, burning calories and keeping everyone physically and mentally healthy. Most importantly, you will be creating strong bonds and memories that will last a lifetime.

[Miami-Dade County Public Schools](#)

[The Parent Academy](#)

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5 Tips to Buying Affordable Vegetables and Fruits

Fruits and vegetables can be expensive, especially during certain times of the year. The following tips, from www.choosemyplate.gov, help make it possible to buy fruits and veggies on any budget to provide the nutrition your family needs!

-Celebrate the season

Use fresh vegetables and fruits that are in season. They are easy to get, have more flavor and are usually less expensive.

-Why pay full price?

Check the local newspaper, online, and at the store for sales, coupons, and specials that will cut food costs.

-Try canned or frozen

Compare the price and the number of servings from fresh, canned, and frozen forms of the same veggies or fruit. Canned and frozen items may be less expensive.



-Store brands = savings

Go for store brands when possible. You will get the same or similar product for a cheaper price.

-Plant your own

Start a garden in the yard or in a pot on the deck for fresh, inexpensive, flavorful additions to meals. Some plants to think of are herbs, cucumbers, peppers and tomatoes. Browse through your local library or online for more information on starting a garden.

For the complete list of tips on buying fruits and vegetables on a budget, click [here](#).

Reference-

Smart Shopping for Veggies and Fruits: 10 tips for affordable vegetables and fruits (USDA)-

<http://www.choosemyplate.gov/food-groups/downloads/TenTips/DGTipsheet9SmartShopping.pdf>

Cooking Healthy and Kid-Friendly

It is 6:00 p.m. You just got home from work and from picking up the kids when suddenly you realize -- What am I making for dinner tonight?!

Below are two recipes from the [Let's Move](#) campaign and [Recipes for Kids Challenge](#) that will not only make your family happy, but also get your children involved in the healthy cooking process!

They're so easy to make you can try one tonight!

Chic' Penne

A whole wheat pasta dish that is bright and fun, with fresh broccoli, chicken and melted cheese

Ingredients

- 3 3/4 cup of whole wheat penne pasta
- 2 3/4 cup of raw broccoli florettes
- 3/4 cup of precooked chicken strips
- 1/2 cup of reduced-fat cheddar cheese (shredded)
- 1/2 cup of mozzarella cheese (shredded)
- 2 tbsp + 2 3/4 tsp of low-sodium chicken broth
- 3/4 tsp of salt
- 3/4 tsp of ground black pepper

Preparation

1. Cook pasta in a stockpot of boiling water or in a steamer for 15 minutes until tender (or according to manufacturer's instructions).
2. Drain pasta and rinse with cool water.
3. Drain pasta again and place pasta in a 13x9x2" cooking dish for a serving of 6.
4. Place broccoli in a stockpot of boiling water or a steamer for about 5 minutes.
5. Drain broccoli (if necessary) and immediately rinse with cool water.
6. Drain broccoli again and pour on top of pasta in cooking dish.
7. Top pasta and broccoli with THAWED pre-cooked chicken strips (chop chicken if pieces are too large) in cooking dish.
8. Sprinkle pasta mixture evenly with shredded cheddar cheese and shredded mozzarella.
9. In a mixing bowl, combine milk, chicken broth, salt and pepper.
10. Pour milk mixture evenly over the pasta mixture and mix with a spoon.
11. Cover the baking dish with foil.
12. Bake until mixture is bubbly and cheese is melted.

Conventional Oven: 350°F for 30 minutes

Convection Oven: 325°F for 25 minutes

Tuscan Smoked Turkey & Bean Soup

The smoky flavor of tender turkey chunks and the rich aroma of seasoned broth

Ingredients

- 3/8 cup of onions, raw
- 1/3 cup of celery, raw
- 1/3 cup of carrots, raw
- Smoked turkey, cooked
- 1 1/2 cups of navy beans, canned, no salt
- 3 1/2 cups of chicken broth or stock, low sodium
- 1/8 tsp of black pepper
- 1/4 tsp of salt
- 1/2 tsp of dried parsley
- 1/4 tsp of dried thyme
- 1 1/2 cups of Kale, raw, trimmed without stem



Preparation

1. Soak and cook dried navy beans according to manufacturer's directions. Quick chill and refrigerate until use.

2. Wash all vegetables before use. Place kale, diced vegetables, tomato paste and garlic in stock pot. Sweat vegetable mixture over medium-high heat until vegetables are softened and onions are translucent. Stir often.

3. Add chicken stock, cooked beans, salt and pepper to vegetable mixture.

4. Reduce temperature to medium/low heat. Cover with lid and simmer for 20 minutes. Stir.

5. Add diced smoked turkey and fresh herbs to soup and simmer for an additional 10 minutes.

Vegetarian Option: Omit smoked turkey, substitute vegetable stock for chicken stock and add 1/8 tsp. liquid hickory smoke flavoring.

Tried cooking the recipe? Let us know how it turned out! Leave us a comment on our [Facebook](#) or [Twitter](#) page.

Legislative Update

The Early Learning Coalition of Miami-Dade and Monroe President and CEO, Evelio Torres, along with other local advocates, have made Tallahassee their home for the last few weeks. They are working very hard to help keep early learning afloat. We would like to thank them for all they do.

Below is one of many articles written about the early learning bills in the Florida House.

Bills would "dismantle" early learning programs, advocates say

Early learning advocates came to Tallahassee on Wednesday to oppose several bills moving through the Florida House.

Their chief concern: HB 7119, which would revise the School Readiness Act. They say the proposal would water down the state's high standards for school readiness providers -- and prescribe a one-size-fits-all model to Early Learning Coalitions across Florida.

"What is at stake here is making genuine progress in helping children to succeed in school and life," said David Lawrence Jr., chair of The Children's Movement of Florida. Evelio C. Torres, the president and CEO of the Early Learning Coalition of Miami-Dade and Monroe counties, said the coalitions need flexibility to meet the unique needs of their communities. He noted that even Miami-Dade and Monroe have different needs. "This is an all-out attack from Tallahassee on local communities," Torres said.

HB 7119 and several other bills were filed in response to an audit of the state's Office of Early Learning that found possible instances of fraud and waste.

On Wednesday, the early learning advocates said they were more comfortable with a conforming bill by Sen. David Simmons that enacts some reforms, but maintains the educational standards. The group also praised efforts by Rep. Marti Coley to preserve high quality programs. Said Lauren Faison, CEO of the Early Learning Coalition of the Big Bend Region: "We are hopeful that any legislative changes that do stick will preserve quality, local control and our ability to serve our families."

Posted by Kathleen McGrory at 6:11 PM on Wednesday, Feb. 29 in Florida Education, Florida Legislature 2012 | [Permalink](#)

Ask Dr. Hughes

Do you have any questions for our resident expert in child development? Ask Dr. Hughes!

Each month, *Parent Link* research and evaluation analyst Christine Hughes, Ph.D., will answer your questions about child development. Topics cover language, social skills, play, behavior, motor skills, and thinking and learning from ages birth to 5-years-old. Dr. Hughes earned her B.A. in psychology from the University of Miami, where she currently teaches part-time. Her research has focused on the development of at-risk infants and children in early intervention. Please email your questions to

info@elcmdm.org with "Ask Dr. Hughes" in the subject line. Also, include the location of your residence in Miami-Dade or Monroe County (e.g., Coconut Grove, Kendall, Key West).

Please note that questions may be edited, and not every question received will be answered in the newsletter. To protect the privacy of individuals and maintain confidentiality, names will not be printed, but we may refer to individuals by area (for example, "A mother in Miami Beach asked..."). The information provided in this column released by the Early Learning Coalition of Miami-Dade/Monroe courtesy of Dr. Hughes is not intended to be used as psychological, mental health or medical service. As laws, details and personal situations vary from person to person and state to state, articles and content contained in the newsletter are not and cannot be used as substitute for legal, parental, health, mental health, or any other advice.

The column is not intended to be a solicitation of business or the furnishing of self-help advice. Readers are strongly urged to consult independent and qualified professionals before making any decisions. The views expressed are those of the writer and not necessarily of the ELC.

ELC and You: VPK Registration 2012-2013

Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten 2012-2013 School Year Program

Registration Sites & Information

2012/2013 School Year Program (children must be 4-years-old by September 1, 2012)

Service Offices

Miami Gardens Neighborhood Service Center
16405 N.W. 25 Ave.
Miami Gardens, FL 33054

Frankie Shannon Rolle Neighborhood Service Center
3750 South Dixie Highway
Miami, FL 33133

Naranja Neighborhood Service Center
13955 S.W. 264 St.
Miami, FL 33032

Dates and Hours of Operation

Monday - Friday:

8:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m. (noon)

Please remember VPK registration is processed throughout the year during regular hours.

Tips and Needed Documents

To avoid delays, bring photocopies of required documents to leave on file. Print clearly on your application form using black or blue pen.

A copy of the following documents are required to process your application:

- Proof of Florida Residency: a document showing name and current home address. Examples: utility bill, valid FL Driver's license, pay stubs.
- Child's Date of Birth: A photocopy of each child's date of birth. Examples: birth certificate, passport, immunization document, religious record showing child's birth date.

Once at the site you will receive:

- A list of certified Miami-Dade County VPK providers
- A Certificate of Eligibility that you must take to the participating VPK provider of your choice to register your child.
- Parent/Guardian Responsibility information sheet.

NOTE: The line will be closed when all of the numbers for the amount of parents the service office can see during the scheduled hours have been given out. Parents are encouraged to go to any location of their choice. Services are given on a first-come, first-serve basis. **For more information, please call 305-373-3521.**

Local Events for the Whole Family!

Liberty City Health Fair (LCHF)

This is an annual full-service fair offering free vital screenings. There will also be entertainment, an aromatherapy room and stress reduction classes.

When: Saturday, March 10, 2012

Time: 10:00 a.m.

Where: 6161 N.W. 9th Ave.
Miami, FL 33127

Cost: FREE

For more information, contact Isheka Harrison at 305-751-1295 ext. 139.

Art by the Sea 2nd Annual Celebration

A free fun-filled outdoor event for all children and families. Some activities include art posters, surfboard painting, live music and more.

When: Saturday, March 10, 2012

Time: 11:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.

Where: Historic Virginia Key Beach Park
4020 Virginia Beach Drive
Key Biscayne, FL 33149

Cost: FREE, but must pay \$6 park entry fee per vehicle

For more information, call 954-558-9664 or visit

www.thebigblueandyou.org.

Hands-on History Day

HistoryMiami is offering families with children with disabilities a special day in their gallery with presentations and exhibits and hands-on activities!

When: Monday, March 12, 2012

Time: 12:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m.

Where: HistoryMiami
101C West Flagler Street
Miami, FL 33130

Cost: FREE with general museum admission (\$8.00)

For more information about the program, call 305-375-5379 or email accessibility@historymiami.org.

Parent Space

The Early Learning Coalition of Miami-Dade/Monroe would like you, our parents, to have an area in the *Parent Link* newsletter that you can call your own. This space will provide advice, tips, jokes, stories, and/or even job opportunities that other local parents wish to share. So don't be shy; send us something you would like to share at info@elcmdm.org. Please note that included submissions may be edited for clarity, etc. We look forward to hearing from you.

About the Early Learning Coalition of Miami-Dade/Monroe

The Early Learning Coalition of Miami-Dade/Monroe is a nonprofit organization dedicated to ensuring high-quality early care and education for children in Miami-Dade and Monroe counties. Through a variety of affordable and innovative early education and voluntary prekindergarten programs, the Coalition serves more than 50,000 children ages birth to 5-years-old and their families. Founded in 2000, the Early Learning Coalition is among 31 similar organizations in the State of Florida established following the enactment of the School Readiness Act, which consolidated Florida's early learning services into one integrated program.