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READING & WRITING AT HOME Give Students Tools for Success

While home literacy activities have already been associated with higher test scores, a new study from the University of Washington shows these activities also provide students with tools for lifetime success.

“People who are good students tend to become good employees by being on time and putting forward their best work,” said Nicole Alston-Abel, a Federal Way Public Schools psychologist who conducted the study while pursuing her doctorate at the UW. “If you make sure your child is academically engaged at home through third grade, kids go on autopilot—they know how to ‘do’ school after that.”

Alston-Abel analyzed data collected by co-author Virginia Berninger, UW Emeritus Professor of Education, who conducted a five-year longitudinal study of academic performance in grades one through seven. As part of that study, Berninger sent home questionnaires asking parents if, and how, they helped their children with reading and writing; Alston-Abel, a former primary teacher, then compared the responses with students’ academic performance.

Among the study’s findings:

- Students spent significantly more time at home reading than writing.
- Without a specific assignment, children were more likely to choose reading as an activity than writing.
- Parents provided more help with writing than with reading.
- Starting at the intermediate grades (fourth and up), writing assignments increased, while parent help for writing declined more gradually than for reading.

- About three-fourths of the fifth- and seventh-grade students used a computer for writing assignments.
- Parents of those older students described their children as “fluent” in using a computer for writing homework for 19% of the fifth-graders, and 53% of the seventh-graders.
- Parent ratings of their student’s “self-regulation,” or ability to stay on task and exhibit other study skills, were associated with academic performance, especially in reading comprehension and written expression.

The study speaks to the need for a collaborative effort between parents and teachers, Alston-Abel said, especially among marginalized populations, and especially now, at a time when kindergarteners, according to Common Core State Standards, are expected to demonstrate basic reading and writing skills.

Teachers can start by asking parents about how they support their child’s learning at home—like with the kinds of questionnaires used in the study. The responses to open-ended questions about what kinds of reading and writing a child does at home, why, and for how long each week, can then inform instruction. Meanwhile, parents who work with their children, Alston-Abel added, are introducing study skills like time management and impulse control.

“Academic success is an all-hands-on-deck enterprise,” Alston-Abel said. “Teacher, parent and student all have a part to play. Fostering home-school partnerships that enhance and extend the experience of the learner can lead to life-long habits that foster success.”

University of Washington. “How reading and writing with your child boost more than just literacy.” ScienceDaily. www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2017/08/170831102149.htm (accessed September 26, 2017).

HAVING A HAPPY & Healthy Halloween

Nutrition can be easily overlooked during a holiday best known for its abundance of candy and sugary treats. That is a shame, since about 1 in 5 school-aged children is obese according to the CDC. This Halloween, consider being the one house on the block that offers healthy trick-or-treat alternatives. Here are some store-bought snacks that can double as trick-or-treat offerings:

- Dried fruit
- Juice boxes
- Fruit bars
- Sugar-free gum
- Snack crackers
- Cheese sticks
- Pretzels
- Apples



EAT BETTER & EATING TOGETHER:

The Connection Between Family Meals & Weight

A new study has found that adults who reported never watching TV or videos during family meals had significantly lower odds of obesity compared to peers who always watched something during mealtimes. Those whose family meals were all home-cooked also had lower odds of obesity than other adults who ate some or no home-cooked meals. The study appeared in the Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics.

“How often you are eating family meals may not be the most important thing. It could be that what you are doing during these meals matters more,” said lead author Rachel Tumin, survey and population health analyst manager at the Ohio Colleges of Medicine Government Resource Center.

“This highlights the importance of thinking critically about what is going on during those meals, and whether there might be opportunities to turn the TV off or do more of your own food preparation,” said Tumin, who conducted the study as part of her PhD dissertation with senior author Sarah Anderson, associate professor of epidemiology in Ohio State’s College of Public Health.

Tumin and Anderson’s analysis found the lowest odds of obesity were for those adults who engaged in both healthy practices (eating home-cooked food and doing it without a TV or video on) every time they ate a family meal.

The results held up after the researchers took into account other differences in the study population, including employment status, whether they were married, race, education, and age. Because it was based on a survey of current behavior and weight, the study does not offer evidence of a cause-and-effect relationship between meal habits and weight.

Ohio State University. “Cooking family meals, skipping TV during those meals linked to lower odds of obesity.” ScienceDaily. www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2017/03/170323183130.htm (accessed September 21, 2017).



NEW STUDY LINKS EXERCISE to Lower Risk of Breast Cancer

A major new report by the American Institute for Cancer Research (AICR) and the World Cancer Research Fund (WCRF) revealed, for the first time, that vigorous exercise decreases the risk of breast cancer. "It can be confusing with single studies when the findings get swept back and forth," said Anne McTiernan, MD, PhD, a lead author of the report and cancer prevention expert at the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center.

"With this comprehensive and up-to-date report the evidence is clear: Having a physically active lifestyle, maintaining a healthy weight throughout life and limiting alcohol—these are all steps women can take to lower their risk."

In the study, pre-menopausal women who were the most active had a 17% lower risk and post-menopausal women had a 10% lower risk of developing breast cancer compared to those who were the least active. Moderate activity, such as walking and gardening, was linked to a 13% lower risk when comparing the most active women to the least active women.

While there are many factors that women cannot control, says Alice Bender, MS, RDN, the American Institute for Cancer Research's Head of Nutrition Programs, the good news from this report is that all women can take steps to lower their breast cancer risk.

"Wherever you are with physical activity, try to nudge it up a bit, either a little longer or a little harder. Make simple food shifts to boost protection—substitute veggies like carrots, bell peppers or green salad for chips and crackers and if you drink alcohol, stick to a single drink or less," said Bender.

"There are no guarantees when it comes to cancer, but it's empowering to know you can do something to lower your risk."

Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center. "Just one alcoholic drink a day increases breast cancer risk, exercise lowers risk." ScienceDaily. www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2017/05/170523084758.htm (accessed September 26, 2017).

OCTOBER RECIPE Zucchini Muffins

- 2 cups grated zucchini
- ¼ cup granulated sugar
- ½ cup sugar-free applesauce
- ½ cup plain, fat-free greek yogurt*
- 3 eggs
- 2 tsp vanilla extract
- 3 cups whole wheat flour
- 1 tsp baking soda
- ½ tsp baking powder
- ½ tsp salt
- 1 tsp cinnamon
- ¼ tsp allspice
- pinch of ground cloves
- pinch of ground nutmeg
- ¼ cup sliced almonds (optional)



Pre-heat oven to 350 degrees. Grease 2 loaf pans or 24 muffin cups. Place grated zucchini in a paper towel and wring out extra moisture. Mix together zucchini, sugar, applesauce, and yogurt. Add in eggs and vanilla. In a separate bowl, whisk together dry ingredients. With a rubber spatula, slowly add in dry mixture, being careful not to over-mix. Fold in almonds. Spoon into prepared pans and bake 40-50 minutes (for bread) or 20-25 minutes (for muffins), rotating halfway through baking.

*You can substitute regular plain, fat-free yogurt. Make sure that it does not have added sugars and remember that it will add more grams of carbs.

Yield: 12 Servings, 2 muffins per serving. Each serving provides 148 Calories, 3 g of Fat, 24.5 g of Carbohydrates, and 7.5 g of Protein. Percentage daily values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Source: <http://staylean.blogspot.com/2011/09/zucchini-bread-muffins.html>

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