School Planning for Food Allergic Children

As parents of children with food allergies, you know that as summer comes to an end, there is more on your mind than stocking up on school supplies. Excitement surrounding the first day inevitably leads to anxiety as visions of cafeteria activity and snack sharing run through your head. Concerns such as these are understandable and valid. It isn’t easy to “let go” of your food-allergic child, especially if it’s his or her first year at school. However, clear communication and trust with the school staff is key for your child to have a safe school year. In addition to your back to school list, don’t forget to include the following items: obtaining a letter from your child’s pediatrician or allergist outlining your child’s food allergy; contacting and meeting with the principal, school nurse and teacher; creating a school health plan. Complete these items well before your child’s first day at school. Getting off to a good, safe start in school depends on a little extra thought, information, planning and communication.

FORMING A PARTNERSHIP WITH THE SCHOOL IS KEY

A good relationship with the school is the most essential key to success in keeping your child safe at school. No matter what the form or content of your school’s plan is for your child, the biggest factor in your child’s safety is the quality of communication and trust between parents and school staff. Any plan is only a tool. It needs to change periodically and as your child's needs change. Parents and teachers need to work as partners. They help each other because they have the same goals: reducing risk and finding out what works best for each child.

COORDINATION OF CARE

The goal of meeting with the school nurse is to develop a coordinated care plan for your child. Make sure the school nurse has documentation of your child’s food allergy; an explanation of why the allergy restricts the child’s diet; the food(s) to be omitted from the child’s diet, and the food or choice of foods that must be substituted. Remember, specific substitutions needed must be specified in a statement signed by a licensed physician.

ITEMS TO ADDRESS WHEN DEVELOPING SCHOOL PLANS

In addition to your child’s allergy documentation, make sure to include guidelines and responsibilities for precautions for emergency care during all school location activities. Examples of items to include in a school plan:

- Signs and symptoms of an allergic reaction
- An emergency treatment plan, including a list of the child’s medications and if an epinephrine device is used
- Training of staff-how it will be done and who will do it
- Parent, child, nurse and other school staff responsibilities
- Rules all children will follow while at school (e.g., no food sharing, guidelines for safety at lunch and snack time)
- Changes in the classroom, cafeteria and elsewhere (e.g., no food as rewards in the classroom)
- Responsibilities and procedures on field trips, on the school bus, for other potential risk situations, etc

Once your child’s plan is created, you will need to update it at key transition times or whenever there is a problem or incident that reveals a gap in the plan. The overall goal for raising children with food allergies is to empower families to improve the day-to-day lives in creating a safe and healthy future for their children.
School Kids Nutrition Tips

Eat a Healthy Breakfast
A healthy breakfast can provide children with the nutrients and fuel to successfully learn and concentrate in school. Serve breakfast containing whole grains, fiber and protein. Avoid breakfast foods made with a considerable amount of sugar or refined grain, which are quickly digested and can leave your child feeling tired or hungry shortly after eating.

Healthy Snacks
Snacks are an important way to get children to consume the assortment and abundance of nutrients. Healthy snacks can help keep your child’s energy levels up, giving them the potential ability to perform better academically. Healthy snacks should contain rich amounts of fiber or protein. Fresh fruits, vegetables, whole grain crackers, and nuts are all examples of healthy snacks you can serve to your kids.

Calcium
Calcium is necessary for the healthy development of strong bones. While dairy milk can provide your child with a high amount of calcium, it’s not the only option. Leafy green vegetables, such as kale, contain calcium. You can serve them to your children to increase the amount of calcium in their diets.

Choose Healthy Fats
Fats are important and necessary source of nutrients for children, but it’s important to choose healthy forms of fat. The majority of fat in your child’s diet should be monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats, which are found in nuts, avocados, olive oil and certain seafood such as salmon. You should exclude trans fats entirely and keep saturated fats to a minimum. Foods that often contain trans fats include fast foods, prepackaged sweets and desserts. Saturated fats are mainly found in animal products such as meat, dairy, eggs and seafood.

Drink Smart
Drinks, such as sugary sodas, fruit juices and sports drinks, are not a necessary part of a child’s diet. These drinks can add unnecessary, nutritionally-deficient calories to your child’s diet, which can cause unwanted weight gain and tooth decay. Provide your child with healthy drink options such as water or non-fat milk.

Dallas ISD Food and Child Nutrition Services
Providing Good Nutrition that Fuels Successful Learning

Like parents, Dallas ISD Food and Child Nutrition Services (FCNS) is dedicated to helping children achieve their potential. Our mission is to provide good nutrition that fuels successful learning. We do this in many ways:

Meet New Federal Guidelines:
Our meals meet the new federal school meal nutrition standards, ensuring students receive the nutrition needed to succeed at school. 2012-2013 school year menus feature more whole grains and increased variety of fruits and vegetables. Under the new standards, students are required to select at least one nutrient-rich vegetable or fruit with their lunch. A well-balanced school lunch consists of protein-rich foods, whole grains, a variety of vegetables and fruits, and low fat milk.

School Breakfast:
School breakfast is offered at every school campus. And a growing number of Dallas ISD elementary, middle and high schools are ensuring all their students start their day well nourished and ready to learn with the free Breakfast in the Classroom program. Schools that provide breakfast in the classroom report higher student breakfast participation, meaning more students start their day alert, focused and ready to tackle the academic challenges of the school day. Breakfast in the Classroom is available to all Dallas ISD schools.

Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program:
In conjunction with Texas Department of Agriculture, FCNS provides the fresh fruit and vegetable program in over seventy elementary schools that qualify for the program. All students in participating schools are provided a fresh fruit or vegetable snack multiple times a week. The goal of the program is to increase the variety of fruits and vegetables students consume.

After-school Snacks:
FCNS provides nutritious snacks that meet federal nutrition requirements to qualifying schools that offer organized after-school care programs, which include education or enrichment activities.

If interested in learning more, please contact your cafeteria supervisor or contact FCNS office at 214-932-5500.