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How Going Back To School Gets Kids Back In Shape

Structured schedules, fitness programs help students shed summer weight gain

COLUMBUS, Ohio -- Millions of parents are sending at least one child back to school this fall, and the start of the new classes may not be the only things weighing on the minds of these students. Studies have shown that many kids actually gain weight during the summer months, and in many ways it is school that helps get them back on a healthy track.

Fuel Up to Play 60, a free program developed by the National Dairy Council and National Football League, is proving to be a program that can help schools create a healthier environment for students. The program provides a free "Playbook" of tools, resources, rewards and engagement activities to empower youth to work with adults in their school community to make healthy changes.

In the Fuel Up to Play 60 program, students are encouraged to consume nutrient-rich foods such as low-fat and fat-free dairy, fruits, vegetables and whole grains, and also achieve at least 60 minutes of physical activity each day. Thirty-six million students not only learn proper nutrition, but now get daily exercise they might not otherwise get thanks to events like the Fuel Up To Play 60 Program.

"We've seen them transform gymnasiums before school and the kids are all exercising together and having fun doing it. That's the key, if they're having fun then they're more likely to participate" said Karen Bakies, Registered Dietician, American Dairy Association.

Fuel Up to Play 60 is offered to all schools with students in grades K-12 at no cost. Students help drive the program, by helping to decide how the program takes shape in their schools. This can include introducing creative ways to bring healthier foods to their cafeterias.

Eating breakfast is another way students are likely to be healthy. Eating breakfast helps control appetites and regulate metabolism.

New guidelines going into effect this fall require school districts to offer healthier food. "We know that breakfast and lunch really fuels a child's day in terms of their academic performance, so it's absolutely important that you get those nutrient-rich foods including low-fat and fat-free dairy, fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and low-fat or lean protein sources as well" said Bakies.

Since the program became available nationwide in 2009, more than 70,000 schools have enrolled, representing almost 75 percent of all school districts in the United States.

Fuel Up to Play 60 has become one of the largest, national, in-school nutrition and physical activity programs that exists today.

For more information on how to get your school district to sign up, go to www.drink-milk.com

American Dairy Association Mideast is a farmer funded organization responsible for increasing demand for dairy products on behalf of dairy farmers in Ohio. For more information, visit www.drink-milk.com and www.ohiodairyfarmers.com

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