

# brain food

What to serve up for breakfast and lunch, so your child can...

by Marygrace Taylor

## ...SCORE AN A ON THE TEST OATMEAL

If your kid needs to remember the name of every U.S. president (in order!), have her start the day with a hot bowl of oats for breakfast. Students who ate this whole grain all-star were shown to have better memories than their peers who had cold cereal, according to a Tufts University study. Researchers think it's the balance of protein and fiber that makes oats unique. A bowlful of oats requires a slow, steady digestion process, which results in sustained energy and improved memory—just what your kid needs for a big day at school.

Give your child's oats the most mileage by serving them with more protein as well as some healthy fat, a combination that'll keep her going until lunchtime, says Amy Shapiro, R.D., a nutritionist who counsels kids and adults through her company, AWS Nutrition. Try oatmeal cooked in protein-rich milk (instead of water), and sprinkle it with chopped almonds or walnuts, both high in unsaturated fats.

## ...STAY ENERGIZED DURING CLASS LEGUMES AND WATER

Pack your child's lunch box with legumes such as edamame, chickpeas (try hummus if your kid doesn't like plain chickpeas), or kidney beans (toss 'em into a salad) to help her avoid an afternoon slump. These foods contain tyrosine, an amino acid that works to keep the brain energized, Shapiro says. (Its polar opposite is tryptophan, which is found in foods like turkey and chicken, and can make you sleepy after you eat.)

Another easy way to combat low energy: water. "If a child is thirsty, he's already dehydrated—and one of the first symptoms of dehydration is fatigue," says Elizabeth Somer, R.D., author of *Eat Your Way to Happiness*. Since the amount of water each kid needs depends on his size, activity level, and even the weather (we lose more water through sweating when it's hot out), encourage your child to drink enough water so that his urine is clear or pale yellow—just be prepared for a daily discussion on pee color! One way to help: "Remind him to take 10 gulps of water every time he passes a fountain," suggests Somer.



## ...SUCCEED LONG-TERM BRIGHTLY-COLORED PRODUCE AND OMEGA-3S

Your kid will have a better chance of getting all she can out of school if she eats foods that promote healthy brain development. One of the top sources: antioxidant-rich fruits and veggies. "Antioxidants protect brain tissue, resulting in improved cognition," says Somer. "New research is finding that some of the compounds in fruits and vegetables can actually tweak your genetic code, turning on your body's production of its own antioxidants," she adds. Produce with the most intense color, such as blueberries, red cabbage, red bell peppers, and carrots, yields the greatest benefits.

The last powerhouse in your kid's brain-boosting arsenal? Foods rich in omega-3 fatty acids, such as fish (try salmon or albacore tuna), walnuts, flaxseeds, and DHA-fortified foods like milk or eggs. "Omega-3s work to protect brain cells by building a coating called myelin, which helps improve signal transmission in the brain," Shapiro says. In other words, they'll help your kid pick up information, form connections between ideas, and solve problems quicker and more accurately—skills that'll carry her all the way through adulthood.

## BEFORE SCHOOL

### Cherry-Almond Breakfast Bake

Prep time: 10 minutes  
Cook time: 45 minutes

- 2 tablespoons ground flaxseeds
- ¼ cup warm water
- 2 cups old-fashioned oats
- 4 cups 1 percent milk
- 1 cup raw almonds, coarsely chopped
- 1 cup dried cherries
- ¼ cup maple syrup
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon
- 1 teaspoon almond extract
- 1 teaspoon salt

1. Preheat the oven to 350°. Lightly grease a 9-by-13-inch baking dish.
2. In a blender, combine the ground flaxseeds with water. Blend on high for 1 minute, until the mixture is frothy. Set aside.
3. In a large bowl, combine the oats, milk, almonds, cherries, maple syrup, cinnamon, almond extract, and salt. Stir in the flaxseed mixture.
4. Pour the batter into the prepared baking dish and bake for 45 minutes. Serve with additional milk and maple syrup, if desired. Oatmeal will last in the fridge for up to 3 days (microwave individual servings for 1 to 2 minutes to reheat).

#### Makes 8 servings

Per serving: calories 332, fat 14 g, protein 11 g, carbohydrates 56 g, dietary fiber 8 g

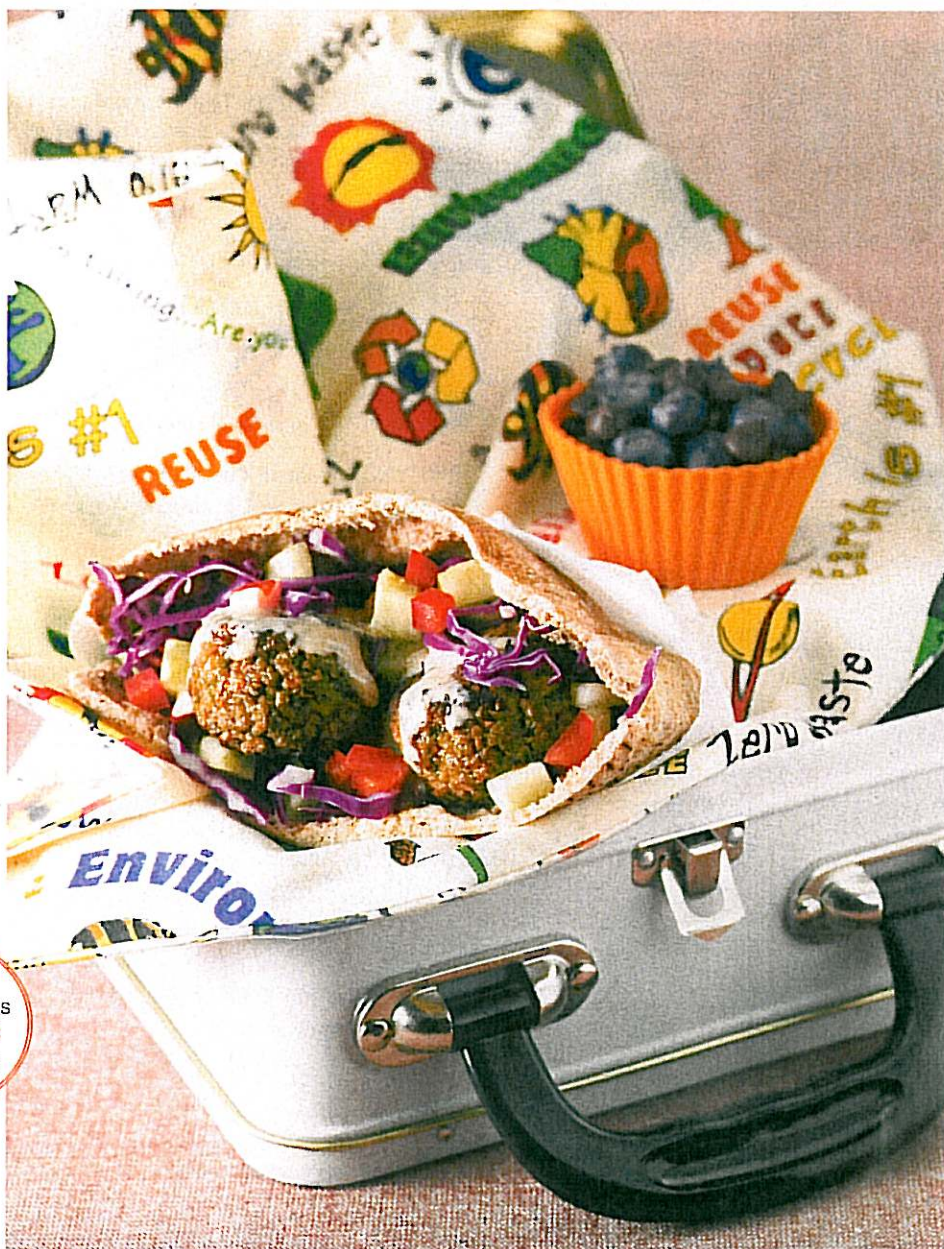
## LUNCHTIME

### Edamame-Carrot Falafel Pitas with Blueberry-Chocolate Cups

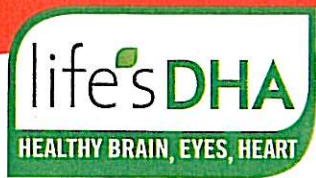
#### EDAMAME-CARROT FALAFEL PITAS

Prep time: 20 minutes  
Cook time: 25 minutes

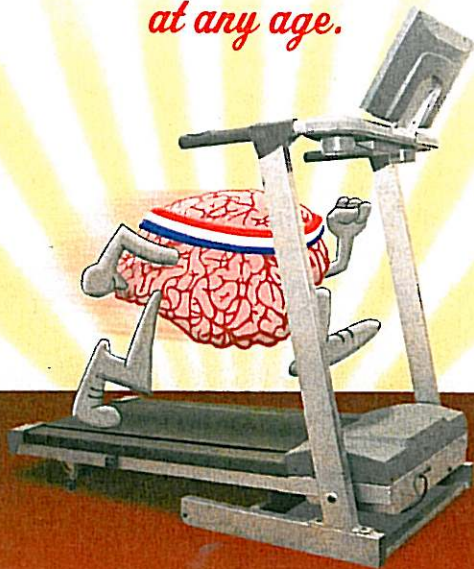
- 1 cup shelled edamame, cooked
- ½ cup carrots, chopped
- ½ small onion, quartered
- ½ cup walnuts
- 2 tablespoons tahini
- 1 clove garlic
- Juice of ½ lime
- ½ teaspoon cumin
- ¾ teaspoon salt
- 1 red bell pepper, seeded and chopped
- 1 cucumber, peeled and chopped
- ½ head red cabbage, thinly sliced
- 4 whole wheat pita pockets
- Tahini-Lime Sauce\* ▶



KIWI  
recommends  
**ORGANIC**  
ingredients



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yummy

let's eat

1. Preheat the oven to 425°. Lightly grease a 9-by-13-inch baking sheet.
2. In a food processor, combine the edamame, carrots, onion, and walnuts until finely chopped. Add the tahini, garlic, lime juice, cumin, and salt, and process until well mixed.
3. Form mixture into 12 golf-size balls. Place on prepared baking sheet and bake for 15 minutes. Flip, bake 10 minutes more, then remove from the oven and let cool.
4. Once the falafel balls are cool, assemble the pita pockets. Place 3 falafel balls in each pita, then top with red bell pepper, cucumber, and red cabbage. Drizzle on 1 to 2 tablespoons Tahini-Lime Sauce, then wrap the pita pocket tightly in parchment paper.

#### Makes 4 sandwiches

Per serving: calories 320, fat 15 g, protein 14 g, carbohydrates 39 g, dietary fiber 8 g

\*To make **Tahini-Lime Sauce**, combine ¼ cup tahini, the juice of ½ a lime, plus salt to taste in a small bowl. Stir, adding enough water (2 to 4 tablespoons) to make a thin sauce.

#### BLUEBERRY-CHOCOLATE CUPS

Prep time: 5 minutes

- 2 cups fresh blueberries
- ½ cup dark chocolate chips

In a bowl, toss blueberries and chocolate chips to combine. Divide mixture among 4 muffin liners and place in a small containers to keep from spilling.

#### Makes 4 servings

Per serving: calories 110, fat 5 g, protein 1 g, carbohydrates 20 g, dietary fiber 3 g

### BRAIN DRAINERS

One more way to help your child perform at her best? Steer her clear of the kinds of things that can lower energy levels and affect concentration. Here are three biggies to watch out for:

**Refined carbohydrates** Foods containing white flour or sugar, such as cookies, candy, or fruit drinks, will cause energy levels to quickly spike—then drop—leaving kids (and grown-ups!) lethargic and irritable.

**Heavy meals** The bigger the portion, the harder your child's body has to work to digest it. The process diverts blood and oxygen from his brain to his stomach, resulting in less energy for those after-lunch classes.

**Artificial colors** The research isn't conclusive, but some studies have linked the consumption of food dyes such as red 40 and yellow 6 to hyperactive behavior in kids.