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WHAT'S IN A HEALTHY LUNCHBOX?

Interview with Gabrielle Hoyte, Nutritionist with the BVI Health Services Authority

NHI: What does a healthy lunchbox look like for a preschooler? Kindergartener? High schooler?

GH: First, let me applaud lunchboxes on a whole because it's a lot easier to be healthy when you have a lunchbox versus when you [send you kids to school with] money. Lunchbox staples don't really change over the age groups, but portions do. *Lunchbox staples are water, fruit, vegetables, healthy grains and lean simple proteins.* As for portions, you don't want to overfeed children. Pay attention to how they normally eat at home to know what portions work best for them.

NHI: What's the one thing that must be in a lunchbox?

GH: Water is an absolute must for kids and adults. The world and we are 70% water. It is absolutely necessary. Almost every reaction that takes place inside of these bodies need water to happen.

NHI: What about junk food like candy and chips – how often can we 'treat' our children?

GH: When I think about junk food, I think junk snacks and junk food. Junk food is like pizza and burgers, then you have the smaller junk like chips and candy. For candy and chips, I'd say once a day, to once every other day. I'm thinking more of the 80/20 rule, that is, 80% healthy, 20% unhealthy. You can be wise about the types and portion sizes of junk. Use the fun-sized or miniature candy bars and cut a bag of chips in half and put them in a smaller zip lock bag. There are even healthier snacks coming out like apple chips that they dry. Or you can choose baked chips instead of fried ones. Bigger treats like burgers, pizza, and fried chicken – [prepare them] either once a week or twice a month. It depends on what type of child you have. If your child is very active, you can afford to treat more. If your child is very sedentary, treat less.

NHI: What advice do you have for parents with picky children?

GH: I've had quite a few picky eaters over the years and it's always difficult. And I'm just the nutritionist so I know it's difficult to be the parent that would have to deal with this every day for every meal. I

would recommend that when you're eating at home, make sure it's a family activity, with very little distractions. Because sometimes I find that picky eaters are really distracted eaters more than picky eaters. It's just because there's so many other things going on, and eating is boring, and they have so many other fun things to do. And make it interesting, whether you're presenting meals with different colours and shapes. If you use meal time as also a time to bring in what they're learning at school, it helps [add value to meal times]. But if you're really struggling, seeing a nutritionist might help because sometimes it's a case where the child needs to be supplemented. They can give you some ideas as to what you can do to supplement.

NHI: How do you know if our children are getting enough nutrients? Any warning signs for those kids who aren't?

GH: I think about a plant. You know if a plant is getting what it needs based on how it looks – is it green? Is it firm? Is it upright? For a child, you look at how they're growing. When you take them to the doctor, are they meeting their milestones like they should – both height and weight? If they're weight is trending down or up abnormally, then you'll know something isn't quite right. How often do they get sick? How often do they catch a cold? It speaks to whether their immune system is getting what it needs to take care of them.

NHI: How can a parent book an appointment with you for a consultation?

GH: If the doctor recommends it, and gives a referral, then you should follow the doctor's orders and visit us. Or if something is really plaguing you. Parents have good intuition. You can tell if something isn't quite right. Especially if you've tried different things and nothing seems to be improving, then that's a good time to reach out to us.

For more information, contact the Nutrition Department at the BVI Health Services Authority via telephone 852-7500.

The National Health Insurance of the Virgin Islands is working in tandem with healthcare providers to fulfill the vision '*Towards a Healthier Virgin Islands*'.

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NOTES TO EDITOR(S): Photograph is attached.

Caption: Gabrielle Hoyte, Nutritionist with the BVI Health Services Authority