

Healthy & Active Parties

Overview

From birthday to holiday parties throughout the school year, children, teachers, and families have numerous reasons to celebrate. Celebrations are a great way for children to feel part of the school community, where the learning environment is made festive and where everyone can come together to enjoy a break from the routine. Parties often center around food, such as cupcakes, cookies, candy, chips and sugary beverages. While these foods, in moderation, can be part of a healthy, well-balanced diet, these unhealthy choices have almost become daily norms in the classroom, rather than exceptions.



Take Action

Break the cycle and incorporate the following suggestions for healthy and active parties in your school:

- Work with your school administration to incorporate healthy and active classroom parties into your Wellness Policy.
- Talk about the need for healthy celebrations at your back-to-school professional development. Ask [staff to pledge](#) to host healthy celebrations this year.
- Share healthy celebration ideas with staff at the beginning of the school year. Present at staff meetings, send staff-wide emails, create a healthy celebrations

folder on your shared drive and put tip sheets in their mailboxes to communicate the message.

- Make use of school and community resources and celebrate at a pool, climbing wall or bowling alley. Ask the PTO or other groups for assistance if funding is a concern.
- Send home a parent letter ([English](#) | [Spanish](#)) that informs parents of healthy celebrations and provides concrete, healthy ideas they can celebrate their child's birthday at school. Consider asking for students input on their favorite fruits and vegetables!
- Think outside of the box. Instead of showing a movie, plan special party games and activities. Ask parents to provide [non-food rewards](#) such as pencils, erasers, stickers and other small school supplies.
- Create a healthy party idea book. Ask school staff and parents to send in healthy recipes and ideas for activities and games. Compile these ideas into a book that staff and parents can use.
- Consider adding extra recess for celebrations or providing parents with a list of healthy options to be served at classroom parties.
- How often are there celebrations in the classroom? Do they occur periodically (e.g., one time per month) or is each child's birthday celebrated individually in addition to other celebrations? Be conscious of how many celebrations your students are participating in, and consider combining these events!

Tips

- Is your school new to healthy celebrations? Use our [10 Tips for Making the Switch to Healthy Celebrations](#) as your guide.
- For birthdays, pick one day each month and celebrate all that month's birthdays on that day, as opposed to having multiple birthday celebrations.
- Focus on FUN rather than FOOD.
- Schedule parties after lunch rather than in the morning to ensure students eat a full, nutritious lunch. Make these parties "snack parties" instead of full meals.
- Remember to be mindful of food allergies, particularly when introducing new foods. Work with your parents to create a list of food allergies for all student to

be distributed at the beginning of the year to specify what food to bring in for celebrations.

- Engage students by asking for their opinion on types of healthy foods or physical activity games they would prefer for their celebration.
- Make it a learning experience and celebrate students' cultural heritage with traditional crafts, games and stories.
- Incorporate special guests into the celebrations. For example, invite parents to come in and read a book or visit the principal's office for a special surprise such as a pencil or sticker.
- Swap out the traditional party foods for healthier options that reinforce messages children are learning about healthy eating in health class and the school cafeteria. Some healthier options to [eat better](#) includes trail mixes, fruit kabobs, and flavored water. [Class party ideas to move more](#) could be going for a walk or hike, having extra time during art or music class, or playing a class game of kickball.
- Add movement whenever possible! Incorporate a [brain break energizer](#) or [song and movement](#) before starting your celebration.
 - Have students bring in their favorite music and have a "dance party."
- Create a plan to navigate challenges with parents who prefer to bring in cupcakes. Mention the benefits of healthy celebrations including:
 - Healthy kids learn better
 - Providing consistent positive nutrition messages
 - Promoting a healthy school environment
 - Creating excitement about nutrition
- Remember to be a [role model for your students](#) by talking about the fruits and vegetables and other healthy items you like to eat. Ask them what fruit or vegetable they tried in the cafeteria. The most adventurous tasters can join you for a special lunch with teacher!
- It is very important to ensure that students with disabilities are full participants in class celebrations. These are opportunities for creating cohesion and social support for students.

Additional Resources

- [Healthy Celebrations Tip Sheet \(ENG/SPAN\)](#) (Action for Healthy Kids)
- [Healthy Food Ideas Tip Sheet \(ENG/SPAN\)](#) (Action for Healthy Kids)
- [MyPlate Tip Sheet](#) (MyPlate)
- [Healthy Celebrations Toolkit](#) (USDA)
- [Healthy Celebration Lessons and Ideas](#) (USDA)
- [Healthy Snack Sign-up Sheet for Parents](#) (Let's Go)
- [Non-Food Celebration Ideas](#) (Let's Go)
- [Healthy Food Celebration Ideas](#) (Let's Go)
- [Tips for Teachers to Promote Healthy Eating & Physical Activity in the Classroom](#) (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)
- Look into [Action for Healthy Kids' Pinterest page](#) for more ideas on healthy and active celebrations!
- [Tips for Year-round Healthy Celebrations](#) (eXtension)
- Specific Celebration Ideas
 - **Seasonal Fall Recipes**
 - [Use these three recipes](#) for healthy classroom celebrations, a fun twist to science or farm-to-school lessons, or to simply enjoy seasonal fruits and veggies.
 - [Election Day](#)
 - Halloween
 - [Healthy Halloween Tip Sheet](#)
 - [Healthy Halloween Game Ideas](#)
 - [Thanksgiving](#)
 - Winter Holidays
 - [Twelve Days of Fitness](#)
 - [Winter Celebrations Tip Sheet](#)
 - 100th Day of School
 - [100th Day of School activities](#)
 - [100th Day of School Celebration Tip Sheet](#)
 - [Healthy Mardi Gras Celebration Tip Sheet](#)
 - Healthy Valentine's Day
 - [Valentine's Day Food Art](#)
 - [Valentine's Day Celebration Tip Sheet](#)

- [St. Patrick's Day Celebration Tip Sheet](#)
- [End of Year Celebrations](#) (including [Graduation](#))

Related Activities

Healthy Halloween Games

Halloween is synonymous with candy and can tempt your students to throw their healthy habits out of the window. Change their minds by introducing healthy Halloween treats and games as a fun alternative!

Host a Healthy St. Patrick's Day

Try our fun food art ideas and ways to live "green" by spending less time in front of a screen.

Ten Tips for Hosting Healthy Celebrations at School

Has your school made the switch to healthy celebrations? Change is tough, and it's easy to feel stuck in unhealthy habits, but we're here to help!

Dia de los Muertos

This year, take some time to learn more about the varied history and practices around Dia de los Muertos and consider your own cultural celebrations and traditions.