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SARAH JESSICA PARKER

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# FOOD

## SMARTS

Ace back-to-school with **healthy lunchbox tips** from White House chef Sam Kass

By Erin O'Donnell, WebMD Contributing Writer

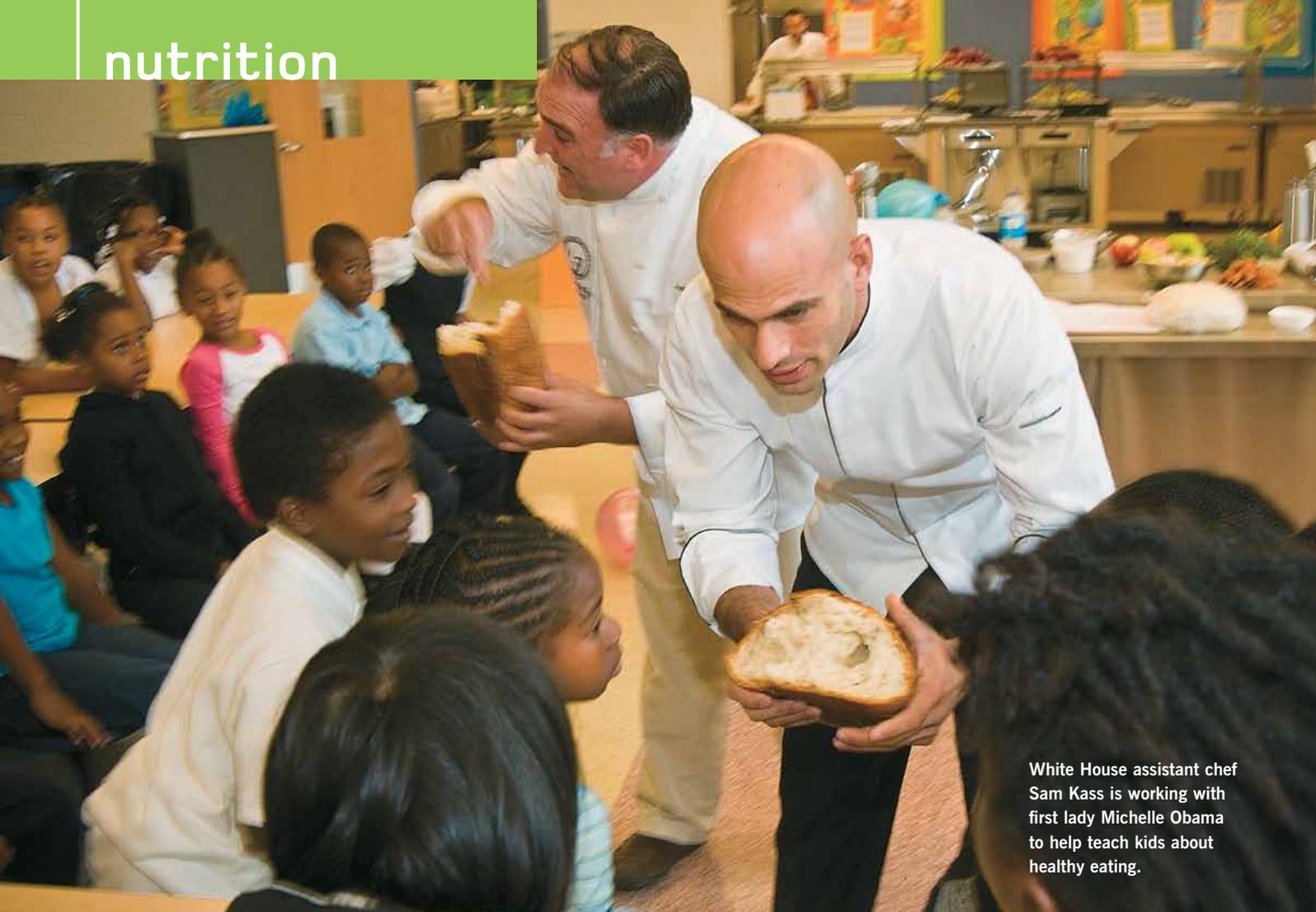
BACK-TO-SCHOOL TIME is all about fresh starts: new notebooks, bright-white kicks, and high hopes for the year ahead. It's also the perfect time for new habits, like healthier meals for everyone in the family, especially your kids. The benefits are well-known: Research shows that children who eat well perform better in school than kids with poor diets.

But how do you make healthy eating a habit in your household? During the school year, it's hard enough for busy families to find the time and energy to prepare any meal, let alone a nutritious one. And so many kids are picky, preferring French fries over fresh vegetables and hot dogs instead of hummus.

Reviewed by  
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RICK LEWIS/GETTY IMAGES; JAMIE GRILL/GETTY IMAGES; FOODCOLLECTION/GETTY IMAGES



White House assistant chef Sam Kass is working with first lady Michelle Obama to help teach kids about healthy eating.

We turned to the White House's assistant chef and senior policy advisor for healthy food initiatives, Sam Kass, who is passionate about teaching kids and their families to enjoy simple, healthy food. Kass helps us kick off the school year by suggesting fun, wholesome lunches to tuck in your child's backpack (see our week's worth of choices on the next page) and sharing what he's learned about inspiring Americans to make good food choices.

Kass, 31, is helping first lady Michelle Obama plant the first major vegetable garden at the White House since Eleanor Roosevelt's victory garden during World War II, and children were in on the project from the start. Now, kids from local schools visit several times a year to plant veggies, pull weeds, and harvest the bounty—and this process has convinced Kass that kids really can learn to love good food.

Kass recalls a group of students dropped by recently to pick and prepare vegetables. When the kids sat down to snack on platters of raw veggies, he noticed one student had heaped most of the cauliflower onto her plate, and was chowing down with gusto. Chuckling, he says he actually had to ask her to put some cauliflower back so there'd be enough to share. "She had never seen or tasted it before," Kass says, "but she was excited about it because she had participated in planting and harvesting it, and so her mind was more open to trying it.

"I see this constantly," Kass says: Kids are most excited about nutritious meals if they play a role in getting food to the table.



GIVE KIDS A CHOICE IN THEIR SCHOOL LUNCHES, SAYS KASS. **"KIDS LIKE TO FEEL THEY HAVE THE AUTHORITY TO MAKE SOME DECISIONS FOR THEMSELVES."**

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Chef Sam Kass and first lady Michelle Obama with kids in the White House garden.

Of course, it also helps their appeal if healthy foods taste delicious, especially at school. To that end, Kass has helped establish programs to make cafeteria food taste better. One initiative, launched through the Let’s Move program (letsmove.gov) developed by Michelle Obama, pairs professional chefs across the nation with their local schools. The pro cooks use their knowledge about making food look and taste good to help cafeteria staff plan healthy meals kids are likely to enjoy.

For example, Kass says, one chef recently worked with a school to whip up kid-friendly dressings to serve on salads. Some chefs are also helping their schools plant gardens similar to the one at the White House, so students can have a hand in growing the tender lettuces, cool cucumbers, and crisp carrots to add to those salads.

Even more kids will eat salads at school this year, thanks to another program that brings salad bars to school cafeterias across the country. Kass believes salad bars are popular with students because they give them a choice.

“They can decide which fruits and vegetables they want, and which they don’t,” Kass says. “Kids like to feel they have the authority to make some decisions for themselves.”

# LUNCHBOX MAKEOVER

Kass’ top 5 healthy school meal ideas

White House assistant chef Sam Kass created this lineup of nutritious lunches to send to school with your kids. Each is a mix of flavors, textures, and nutrients, and a few even include cookies! (Just make sure they are a healthy choice with whole grains, if possible, minimal sugar, and no trans fats.) These lunches also need a beverage—your child can get a carton of low-fat milk at school to pair with each weekday meal.

**MONDAY** ▶ Turkey wrap made with lettuce and a slice of cheddar cheese on a whole-wheat tortilla, baby carrots, grapes, and two small oatmeal cookies

**TUESDAY** ▶ Whole-wheat pasta tossed with pesto and chopped cooked spinach, applesauce, and two whole-grain crackers

**WEDNESDAY** ▶ Sliced chicken on whole-wheat bread spread with hummus, small low-sugar yogurt, baby carrots, and two fig bars

**THURSDAY** ▶ Tiny “sandwiches” made with a dollop of tuna salad between two cucumber slices (kids can assemble them at lunch), a quartered orange, two celery sticks filled with peanut butter, and two whole-grain crackers

**FRIDAY** ▶ Cheese quesadilla made with a whole-wheat or veggie tortilla, diced tomatoes, red pepper or your child’s favorite vegetable, an apple, a banana, and two small chocolate chip cookies



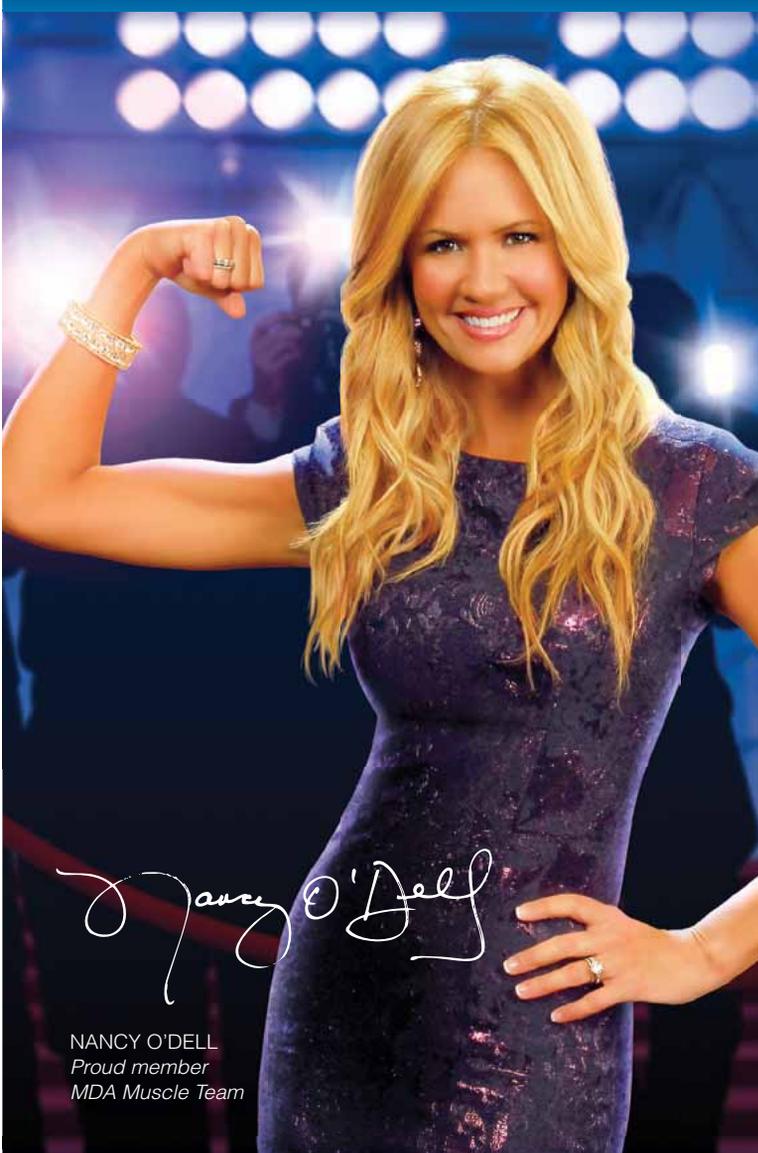
FROM LEFT: BOB NICHOLS; TANYA ZOUJEV/STOCKFOOD



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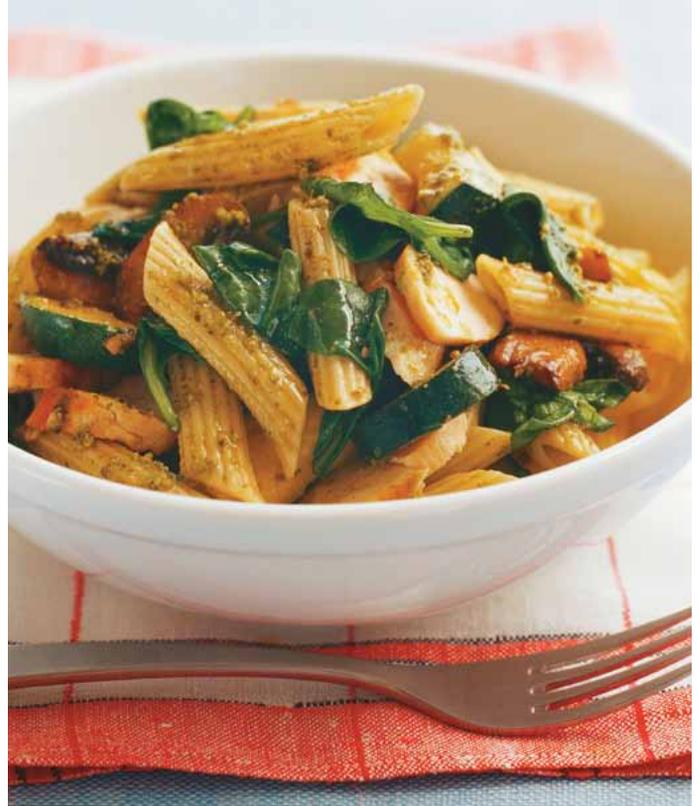


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## NO KIDDING

You really *can* get children to eat healthy

**White House chef Sam Kass** has learned a thing or two about getting kids interested in nutritious fare. The main idea, he says, is to actively engage them in any stage of meal planning and preparation.

Here are a few of Kass' top tips.

**Freedom of choice.** During your next grocery run, ask your child to select her three favorite veggies to include in family meals. Kids are more likely to eat foods they've chosen themselves.

**Seed for change.** Help your child plant and tend a windowsill herb garden, Kass suggests. It's a simple way she can help feed the family. Be sure to compliment any dish that includes herbs she harvests.

**Farm stand.** Visit a farm or orchard with your child to see where food is grown and maybe meet the grower. Knowing where an apple or ear of corn comes from can make it taste even better.

**Chop, chop.** Kass recommends you invite your child to chop and stir ingredients while you make meals.

**Heroic effort.** Talk with kids about professional athletes or movie stars they admire, and point out that to succeed, "those people really take good care of themselves" by eating healthy diets, Kass says.