



Developing healthy eating habits

Children develop a natural preference for the foods they enjoy the most, so the challenge is to make healthy choices appealing. No matter how good your intentions, trying to convince your eight-year-old that an apple is as sweet a treat as a cookie is not a recipe for success! However, you *can* ensure that your children's diet is as nutritious and wholesome as possible, even while allowing for some of their favorite treats.

The childhood impulse to imitate is strong, so it's important you act as a role model for your kids. It's no good asking your child to eat fruit and vegetables while you gorge on potato chips and soda.

Top tips to promote healthy childhood eating

- **Have regular family meals.** Knowing dinner is served at approximately the same time every night and that the entire family will be sitting down together is comforting and enhances appetite. Breakfast is another great time for a family meal, especially since kids who eat breakfast tend to do better in school.
- **Cook more meals at home.** Eating home cooked meals is healthier for the whole family and sets a great example for kids about the importance of food. Restaurant meals tend to have more fat, sugar, and salt. Save dining out for special occasions.
- **Get kids involved.** Children enjoy helping adults grocery shop, selecting what goes in their lunch box, and preparing dinner. It's also a chance for you to teach them about the nutritional values of different foods, and (for older children) how to read food labels.
- **Make a variety of healthy snacks available instead of empty calorie snacks.** Keep plenty of fruits, vegetables, whole grain snacks, and healthy beverages (water, milk, pure fruit juice) around and easily accessible so kids become used to reaching for healthy snacks instead of empty calorie snacks like soda, chips, or cookies.
- **Limit portion sizes.** Don't insist your child cleans the plate, and never use food as a reward or bribe.

Persuading children to eat more fruit and vegetables

Making mealtimes playful can mean healthier eating for your kids. Here are some fun, creative ways to add more fruit and vegetables to your child's diet:

- Top a bowl of whole grain cereal with a smiley face: banana slices for eyes, raisins for nose, peach or apple slice for mouth.
- Make frozen fruit kabobs for kids using pineapple chunks, bananas, grapes, and berries.
- Go food shopping with your children. Let them see all the different fruits and vegetables and have them pick out new ones to try.
- Try fruit smoothies for a quick healthy breakfast or afternoon snack.
- Add vegetables and fruits to baked goods – blueberry pancakes, zucchini bread, carrot muffins.
- Add extra veggies to soups, stews, and sauces, grated or shredded to make them blend in.
- Keep lots of fresh fruit and veggies washed and available as snacks. Apples, pears, bananas, grapes, figs, carrot and celery sticks are all easy to eat on the run.

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