

Helping Your Child or Teen Develop Healthy Eating Habits

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1) Offer Foods from At Least 3 Food Groups At Each Meal

To get enough calories and nutrients offer foods from the breads and cereals, fruits, vegetables, dairy and meat groups. At each meal serve foods from at least three food groups. For example, serve a whole grain cereal, low fat milk and a fruit for breakfast; sandwich made with low fat lunchmeat and raw vegetables on the side for lunch; and chicken with rice and carrots on the side for dinner.

2) Cut Down On Fat

Children over two years old can follow a low fat diet similar to adults. Simple fat-cutting steps include serving low fat or nonfat dairy products, trimming fat from meats before cooking and reducing added fats in food (e.g., butter, margarine, oil, salad dressing).

3) Follow A Schedule for Meals and Snacks

The chance of overeating goes down when kids know when to expect the next meal or snack. Offer snacks at least two hours before mealtime so your child is hungry for meals. Try to stick to a schedule with a beginning and an end to each meal. Eat as a family as often as possible.

4) Involve Kids In Food Shopping and Preparation

Grocery shopping with your child is an opportunity for him to select fruits and vegetables he likes and try new foods. Older children can learn how to compare labels on food packages. Children are more likely to eat foods that they help buy and prepare.

5) Offer Single Serving Healthy Snacks

Serve snacks and treats in small portions (1/2 cup bowls) or offer a single serving package instead of the whole package. Occasional treats of ice cream, potato chips, candy, and the like do no harm. Restricting favorite foods can cause anxiety and lead to overeating if the child fears being deprived of the food. Store snacks in areas out of sight. Foods left on the counter are constant reminders to eat them.

6) Offer Water for Drinks

Water does not promote weight gain and is better for children's teeth than juice or soft drink. Offer the water in attractive cups and remember to drink water yourself. If the child refuses water, try diluting the juice and soda with water.

7) Have a Designated Eating Place

Allow eating only in the kitchen or dining room. Eating should not be paired with other activities such as watching television, or reading, so the child can focus on what he is eating and stop when he is full.

8) Be a Good Role Model

Parents and caregivers who are positive role models for healthful eating have a great impact on their kids.