

Healthy Choices, Healthy Kids

Learn how you can help the children in your life to eat healthier

Those of us with children in our lives share one thing in common – we want what's best for our kids. Whether you're a parent or grandparent, aunt or uncle, teacher or caregiver, getting the children in your life to eat right can be a big challenge. We all know that a healthy diet helps kids grow and stay strong, but actually getting kids to eat healthy sometimes seems almost impossible. Learning how to encourage healthier habits can make a big difference for the child in your life.

The Challenge: Why don't kids eat healthy?

Kids are all different when it comes to what they like to eat. While you may be lucky to have children who prefer fruits and vegetables to candy and salty snacks, many kids just seem to dislike the foods they should be eating.

Many pre-school children get started in the wrong direction by eating unhealthy foods that brothers, sisters, friends or caregivers happen to have around the house. Grade-schoolers are often picky eaters – they get stuck in the 'rut' of eating the same foods over and over – rarely trying new things. Teens are usually more independent – they make more decisions about what they eat, but they often make poor choices or even skip meals.

Whether you have a young child in your life or an older child going through a growth spurt, it's important to encourage them to eat right to help them stay healthy and develop the way they should.

The solution: How you can help!

Getting children to eat healthy may be frustrating and seemingly impossible, but you can do it! Here are a variety of tips that can

help you improve the eating habits and health of the children in your life. The more of these healthy habits that you can include in your child's life – the more successful you will be. Different approaches work for different children. So try as many of these healthy ideas as possible and see which ones work for you:

Follow the pyramid: Whole grains, vegetables, fruits, beans, low fat dairy and lean protein should be at the core of your family meals. For more information about following USDA's MyPyramid recommendations go to www.mypyramid.gov.

Set a good example: The number one way children learn is by watching you. If you have poor eating habits, children will often develop the same bad habits.

Try to set a good example by eating vegetables at meal-time, fruit for dessert, and healthy snacks during the day.

Start young: Teach children healthy habits from an early age. Many of the habits they learn can stick with them when they're older. The younger you start, the better the chance of establishing healthy habits from the beginning.

Expose kids to different foods: Children often do not like a food the first time they try it. But don't give up. If you keep offering the food eventually many children learn to like it. Experts say that it can take up to ten tries before a child will start to eat some foods. If they don't like it after 10 or more tries, then move on to a new food and try again later.

Don't force it: Experts recommend letting children try foods again and again without being forced to eat the whole thing. By trying a little bit at a time, they can get familiar with healthy foods without feeling forced into eating them, until they're ready.



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Tell them why: Kids always want to know "why". Understanding why certain foods are healthy and why other foods are not can be a big help in changing their behavior. For example, let them know that low fat or fat free milk is important for strong bones so that they can run and play; or that fruits and vegetables can boost their bodies 'immune system' – to help keep them from getting sick.

Keep a healthy house: Children will eat what is available to them. That's why it is important to keep 'healthy food in' and 'junk food out' of the house. Keep fruits, vegetables, and other healthy snacks like low-fat yogurt or string cheese in the refrigerator. Keep cookies, cakes, soda and other treats for special occasions (not for everyday snacks).

Let kids help: Children will be more open to trying new things if they are involved. Encourage them to choose what healthy foods to have at meals and let them help with cooking. Young children can help with little things like getting out the ingredients or setting the table and older children can help with cutting, washing and cooking foods.

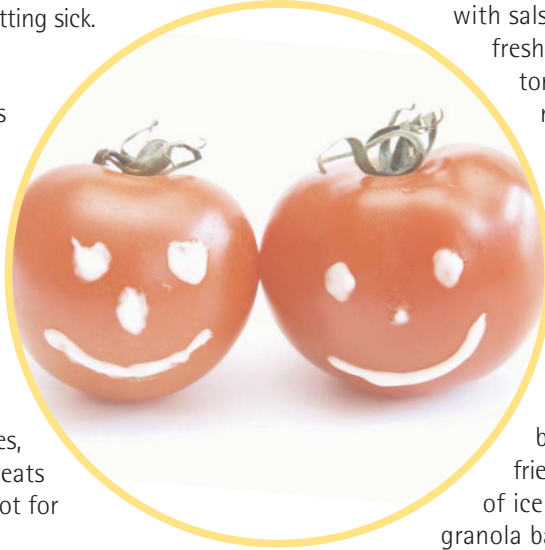
Have set meal times: Have sit-down meals with family whenever possible. Studies show that the more meals you have together the more likely your children are to develop healthy eating habits and the less likely they are to abuse substances like drugs and alcohol. Make healthy eating a good experience and give children positive associations with healthy foods.

Make healthy choices away from home: Kids can eat healthy on the go too. At the school cafeteria or a convenience store look for sandwiches on whole-wheat bread, whole-grain

cereals, low-fat dairy products, and fresh fruit. At restaurants choose sandwiches with grilled chicken and veggies or small hamburgers without the mayo.

Top-it, Add-it, Mix-it: You can get kids to eat healthy foods by learning how to include them in any meal. Top scrambled eggs with salsa or top yogurt with fresh fruit, add lettuce and tomato to sandwiches, or mix diced veggies into sauces, burgers, or meatloaf.

Switch-it: Making simple, healthier substitutions can go a long way. Give them milk or water instead of soda, veggies or a baked potato instead of fries, fruit or yogurt instead of ice cream, or a low-fat granola bar instead of candy.



Get Moving: Getting kids active is just as important as getting them to eat healthy. Make exercise fun rather than something they have to do. For example go on walks together after dinner, play outdoor games, or go to the park. Also, encourage them to participate in after-school sports and activities.

Get Help: You don't have to do it alone. Talk to your doctor or a registered dietitian to get advice about a diet and exercise plan that is right for you and your family.

See what works for the kids in your life. Be creative and be positive. Try different ideas to 'mix-it-up' and keep it interesting. These changes can help improve your child's life and your life too! Be a positive role model for your children and teach them good habits early on to help them have a healthier life and a brighter future.



Since everyone's health history and nutritional needs are so different, please make sure that you talk with your doctor and a registered dietitian to get advice about the diet and exercise plan that's right for you.

