

# A Parent's Guide to Healthy Eating

Helping your kids develop good eating habits early in life is important. Not only does a healthy diet help your children feel their best today, but it also can impact their health later in life. Here are some tips to help you give your children a healthy start.

- 1) **Be Responsible.** It is your responsibility to provide a variety of healthy, nutritious foods for meals and snacks for your child to choose from. Everyday, be sure to serve foods from all five groups of the USDA's MyPyramid ([www.mypyramid.gov](http://www.mypyramid.gov))-whole grains, fruits, vegetables, low fat dairy products and low fat protein sources like fish, chicken, beans and lean meats. Save foods high in sugar, fat, and salt for an occasional treat.
- 2) **Offer Healthy Choices.** Let your child choose from the variety of healthy foods you are serving. Don't force them to eat everything or clean their plate -- let them decide how much food to eat. No need to make a big deal out of any one meal -- it is what your child eats over the course of a week that is important. So if your kids don't choose to eat the broccoli served at dinner, they can eat carrot sticks with dip as a snack, tomato soup at lunch and pumpkin bread for dessert.
- 3) **Be a Good Role Model.** Children learn eating habits in the same way they learn other important behaviors- by imitation. Look at your own eating habits. By choosing healthful foods, you are encouraging your child to do the same. Healthy eating is a family affair – next time you sit down to watch television share a bowl of fruit instead of a bag of chips.
- 4) **Don't be a Short Order Cook.** Set limits to requests – kids will often use food to manipulate parents. Be clear on expectations at meal times and set house rules: "You don't have to try it now, maybe next time we eat this". Always make sure you have something healthy available that your child will eat such as a piece of fruit, bread or milk. This will ensure your child will get some nutritious foods to hold them until the next meal or snack.
- 5) **Be Patient.** Establishing healthy eating habits takes a lifetime. Keep in mind that kids normally go through phases of picky eating and it can take as many as 10 exposures to a new food before a child (or adult!) begins to like it. When offering something new serve it with something familiar. For example, serving cauliflower with a cheese sauce might help a child be more willing to try it.
- 6) **Eat at Home.** Make time for family meals at home and provide food in a loving, supportive environment. A menu plan can help reduce dinnertime stress and insure your family is getting the good nutrition they need. Let your children plan the menu for one or two nights with their favorite foods but introduce them to new flavors and foods on the other nights.
- 7) **Try New Recipes.** Today's lifestyles demand quick and easy meals. Look for new ideas on how to serve healthy foods in fun, creative ways that kids will enjoy. Homemade burritos and pizzas can be healthy alternatives to the fast food drive-through.

- 8) **Turn off the TV.** Limit the amount of television children watch – not only to encourage kids to be more physically active but also to decrease the number of television commercials children see. Advertising can have powerful effects on what foods your kids want to eat.
- 9) **Balance food with fitness.** Food intake should equal energy output in order to maintain a healthy weight and reduce the risk of chronic diseases such as heart disease, hypertension, diabetes, and certain cancers. Exercising with your children will reinforce healthy behaviors that will last a lifetime.
- 10) **Plan ahead.** Make sure you have healthy foods like whole grains, vegetables, fruits, and milk on hand. Stock your kitchen with lots of healthy food choices from the food guide pyramid.