



Healthy Eating: Tips for Kids and Teen

Why is healthy eating important?

Eating a variety of healthy foods will help your child get the protein, carbohydrate, fat, vitamins, and minerals he or she needs for normal growth. Healthy eating also can help your child stay at a healthy weight and have lots of energy for school and play. Childhood is the best time to learn the healthy habits that can last a lifetime.

Encourage your child to eat the following foods:

- Fruits and vegetables
- Lean meats and other protein, such as soy foods and beans
- Nonfat and low-fat dairy products
- Whole grains

Limit the following foods:

- Sweet liquids, such as soda, fruit juices, and sport drinks
- Fat
- Sugar
- Highly processed foods
- Fast foods

How can you teach your child to eat healthy foods?

You don't have to change everything at once. This may help you avoid power struggles that may happen if you pressure your child to eat certain foods.

Start with small, easy-to-achieve changes, such as offering more fruits and vegetables at meals and snacks.

- Slowly cut down on soda pop and other high-sugar drinks.
- At mealtime, serve whole milk if your child is between ages 1 and 2. The essential fatty acids in whole milk are needed for brain growth and development. Serve fat-free or low-fat milk to children over the age of 2. Children under 12 months should not drink cow's milk.
- At other times of the day, serve water to quench thirst.

Keep a variety of foods available. Healthy and kid-friendly snack ideas include:

- String cheese.
- Whole wheat crackers and peanut butter.
- Air-popped or low-fat microwave popcorn.
- Frozen juice bars made with 100% real fruit.
- Fruit and dried fruit.
- Baby carrots with hummus or bean dip.
- Low-fat yogurt with fresh fruit.

Eat together as a family as often as possible. Keep family meals pleasant and positive. Avoid making comments about the amount or type of food your child eats. Pressure to eat reduces children's acceptance of new or different foods.

- Make healthy choices for family meals. Children notice the choices you make and follow your example.
- Make meal times fairly predictable. Eat at around the same times every day.
- Have meals often enough (for example, about every 3 hours for toddlers) that your child doesn't get too hungry.
- Do nothing during the meal other than talking and enjoying each other.

WHO'S IN CHARGE?

Share the responsibility for healthy eating. You decide when, where, and what the family eats. Your child chooses whether and how much to eat from the options you provide.

Young children are good at listening to their bodies. They eat when they're hungry. They stop when they're full. When we try to control how much children eat, we interfere with this natural ability. This division of responsibility helps your child stay in touch with those internal cues.

Is it okay for kids to be vegetarians?

A well-planned vegetarian diet that includes milk products and eggs is perfectly safe for children and teens. Being a vegetarian can be a great way to get them into a lifelong habit of healthy eating.

If your teen decides to become a vegetarian, teach him or her how to plan meals to get all the right nutrients every day. Teens need calcium and vitamin D. And iron is especially important for teen girls who are menstruating.

Talk with your doctor about how much of these vitamins and minerals your child needs. Ask if your teen needs to take a daily supplement.

Vegan diets must be carefully planned in order to be safe for children. A vegan diet includes only fruits, grains, nuts, seeds, vegetables, and vegetable products and no animal or dairy products of any kind. Children have small stomachs, and the fiber they eat can fill them up before they get enough calories. Young vegan children tend to be slightly smaller but still within normal ranges for growth. And they tend to catch up to other children in size as they get older.

DO YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS AFTER READING THIS INFORMATION?

It's a good idea to write them down and take them to your next doctor visit.

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