



It's no surprise that parents are confused about what it means to "eat healthy". From the MyPlate guidelines to the latest food fad, it can be mind-boggling. The good news is that you don't need a degree in nutrition to raise a healthy child.

By following some basic guidelines you can create an environment that encourages your child to eat right and maintain a healthy weight.

Kids and Food: 10 tips for parents

1. Parents control the supply lines.

You decide which foods to buy and when to serve them. Kids will pester their parents for less nutritious foods, adults are in charge when deciding which foods are regularly stocked in the house. Kids won't go hungry. They'll eat what's available in the cupboard and fridge. If their favorite snack isn't all that nutritious, you can still buy it once in a while so they don't feel deprived.

2. Let the kids choose what, or if, they will eat from the foods you offer.

Kids need to have some say in the matter. From the selections you offer, let them choose what to eat and how much of it they want. This may seem like a little too much freedom. But if you follow step 1, your kids will be choosing only from the foods you decided to bring into the house.

3. Quit the "clean-plate club".

Let kids stop eating when they feel they've had enough. Lots of people who are parents today grew up under the clean-plate club rule, but that approach doesn't help kids listen to their own bodies when they feel full. When they notice and respond to feelings of fullness, they're less likely to overeat.

4. Start them young.

Food preferences are developed early in life, so offer a variety of foods. Likes and dislikes begin forming even when kids are babies. You may need to serve a food on 10 to 15 different occasions for a child to take to it. Don't force a child to eat, but offer a few bites. With an older child, ask them to try one bite.

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5. Rewrite the kids' menu.

Who says kids only want to eat hot dogs, pizza, burgers, and macaroni and cheese? When eating out, let your children try new foods and might surprise you with their willingness to experiment. You can start by letting kids try a little of whatever your ordered.

6. Calories in drinks count.

Soda and other sweetened drinks add extra calories and get in the way of good nutrition. Water and milk are the best drinks for kids. Juice is fine when it's 100%, but kids don't need much of it - 4-6 ounces a day is enough for preschoolers

7. Put sweets in their place.

Occasional sweets are fine, but don't turn dessert into the main reason for eating dinner. When dessert is the prize for eating, kids naturally place more value on the cupcake than the broccoli.

8. Food is not love.

Find better ways to say "I love you". When foods are used to reward kids and show affection, kids may start using food to cope with stress or other emotions. Offer hugs, praise, and attention, instead of food treats. Remember, food is a necessity, not a reward.

9. Kids do as you do.

Be a role model and make good nutritional choices yourself. When teaching good eating habits, try to set the best example possible. Choose nutritious snacks, eat at the table, and don't skip meals.

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not a reward.**

10. Limit TV and computer time.

When you do, you'll avoid mindless snacking and encourage activity. Research has shown that kids who cut down on TV-watching also reduced their percentage of body fat. When TV and computer time are limited, kids will find more active things to do. And when the whole family limits "screen time", you'll have more time to be active together.

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