

Nutrition for Kids

Parents want to do what they can to ensure their children are healthy. Proper nutrition is essential to good health, disease prevention, and adequate growth and development so it is important that good eating habits start early. Whether your child is a toddler or a teen, here are important nutrition tips that will help your child develop healthy eating habits that will last a lifetime:

- Eat as a family- Research shows that the diets of children who eat frequent family meals include higher amounts of important nutrients, more servings of fruits and vegetables and lower amounts of fat. In addition, family mealtime may contribute to healthier weights and improved performance in school.
- Model healthy habits- Children model their behavior (including eating habits) after parents and other adults in their life so it is important to practice what you preach when it comes to nutrition.
- Allow your child to develop their own food preferences- Avoid passing on your food preferences to your children. For example, if you think broccoli is blah, make sure to serve it to your children anyway and avoid the urge to make comments like, “Ew gross,” when it is served. This will help to ensure that your child will try it with an open mind and just may end up being a broccoli lover.
- Make breakfast a daily event- Breakfast is known as the most important meal of the day yet over 1/3 of children skip this morning meal. Eating breakfast helps to ensure that kids get the nutrients that their growing bodies need. In addition, eating breakfast is linked to a reduced risk for obesity and better performance in school.
- Include your child in meal planning, grocery shopping and preparation- Including your children in grocery shopping and meal preparation can be a great opportunity for you to teach them about healthy foods. In addition, if you have picky eaters, they are more likely to try foods that they have helped to pick out or prepare. When shopping encourage your child to pick out a new fruit or vegetable each week for your family to try.
- Expose kids to a variety of foods- Although it may seem like all your child wants to eat is mac n’ cheese or peanut butter and jelly, continue to serve them a variety of foods. Children often need to be exposed to new foods many times before they will want to try it or enjoy eating it. So don’t give up on a food just because they didn’t like it the first time they tried it. Keep putting small amounts on their plate and you may be surprised when one day they ask for more.
- Be flexible and allow treats- Raising a healthy child means serving them healthy foods most of the time but also allowing them to occasionally eat foods just because they are fun to eat and taste good. Allowing occasional treats like candy or cookies teaches them how to include these foods in their diet in moderation.
- Don’t encourage kids to be members of the “clean plate club”- Children’s appetites can vary greatly from day to day so trust their appetite and don’t force them to eat if they are not hungry. Make sure to serve them kid-sized portions, (which often seem really small compared to adult sized servings) and then allow them to ask for more if they are still hungry. If they are often not hungry at mealtimes, try to cut down on their snacking between meals and limit their consumption of low nutrient beverages like fruit drinks and soda as those can fill them up while providing little nutrition. For more on feeding children, please visit: <https://www.ellynsatterinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/handout-dor-tasks-cap-2016.pdf>

This medical and/or nutritional information is not intended to be a substitute for individual advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Always seek the advice of your physician or other qualified health provider with any questions you may have regarding a medical condition.