

Helping kids build healthy eating habits



Food can serve a lot of purposes. It fills our dietary needs, it can be fun and culturally important, and eating with loved ones can provide opportunities for bonding and togetherness. However, poor eating habits in childhood can follow your kids into adulthood, potentially contributing to health issues and a difficult relationship with food in the future.

Teaching kids about the benefits of healthy eating can help set them up for a lifetime of wellness. Here are a few tips that can help you and your family build healthy eating habits and a positive relationship with food:

- **Avoid forbidding foods:** When you make a food entirely off-limits, you risk making your child more interested in that food, and more likely to overindulge in it when they get the chance. This also leaves your child believing there are “bad” foods, which can lead to a poor relationship with foods. Instead, take a balanced approach suggesting all foods can fit, in moderation. Where possible, look for simple, healthy swaps, like switching out french fries for apple slices, soda for milk, white bread for whole wheat, and so on.
- **Involve your kids and share tasks:** Kids love having a say in what they do and giving them choices allows them to feel both independent and invested. Consider taking them to the grocery store and offering them simple choices like choosing between red or green apples. When possible, try to include kids in age-appropriate kitchen tasks like mixing ingredients, washing vegetables, or peeling potatoes.
- **Set family mealtimes and eat together:** Kids thrive on routines, so aim to eat together as a family and serve meals and snacks around the same time every day, if possible. This way, kids are less likely to graze or overeat.
- **Encourage mindful eating:** It’s important that all of us, even kids, learn to recognize internal hunger and fullness cues. Kids are very good at self-regulating, so it’s best not to insist that kids clean their plates to get dessert. Insisting they eat when they’re not hungry can introduce a pattern of overeating.
- **Make mealtime the focus:** Put away toys and screens during mealtime. Without these distractions, you and your family can focus on mindful eating, enjoying the meal, and spending quality time together.
- **Lead by example:** Kids pick up the habits and values you model for them, so make sure you’re demonstrating ways of life that you want them to emulate. Let your kids see you trying new cuisines, cooking meals at home, shopping for healthy foods, and embracing movement and exercise.