

# Health and Nutrition for the young child

By teaching your children healthy eating habits, and modeling these behaviors in yourself, you can help your children maintain a healthy weight and normal growth. Also, the eating habits your children pick up when they are young will help them maintain a healthy lifestyle when they are adults.

Your child's health care provider can evaluate your child's weight and growth and let you know if your child needs to lose or gain weight or if any dietary changes need to be made.

Some of the most important aspects of healthy eating are portion control and cutting down on how much fat your child eats. Simple ways to reduce fat intake in your child's diet and promote a healthy weight include serving:

- Low-fat or nonfat dairy products
- Poultry without skin
- Lean cuts of meats
- Whole grain breads and cereals
- Healthy snacks such as fruit and veggies

Also, reduce the amount of sugar sweetened drinks and salt in your child's diet.

Other approaches parents can take to develop healthy eating habits in their children include:

- **Guide your family's choices rather than dictate foods-** Make a wide variety of healthful foods available in the house. This practice will help your children learn how to make healthy food choices. Leave the unhealthy choices like chips, soda, and juice at the grocery store. Serve water with meals.
- **Encourage your children to eat slowly-**A child can detect hunger and fullness better when they eat slowly. Before offering a second helping or serving, ask your child to see if they are truly still hungry. This will give the brain time to register fullness. Also, that second helping should be much smaller than the first.
- **Eat meals together as a family as often as possible-** Try to make mealtimes pleasant with conversation and sharing, not a time for scolding or arguing. If mealtimes are unpleasant, children may try to eat faster to leave the table as soon as possible. They then may learn to associate eating with stress.
- **Involve your children in food shopping and preparing meals-** These activities will give you hints about your children's food preferences, an opportunity to teach your children about nutrition, and provide your kids with a feeling of accomplishment. In addition, children may be more willing to eat or try foods that they help prepare.
- **Plan for snacks-** Continuous snacking may lead to overeating, but snacks that are planned at specific times during the day can be part of a nutritious diet, without spoiling a child's appetite at meal times. You should make snacks as nutritious as possible, without depriving your children of occasional chips or cookies, especially at parties or other social events.
- **Discourage eating meals or snacks while watching TV-**Try to eat only in designated areas of your home, such as the dining room or kitchen. Eating in front of the TV may make it difficult to pay attention to feelings of fullness, and may lead to overeating.

- **Encourage your children to drink more water**-Over consumption of sweetened drinks and has been linked to increased rates of obesity in children.
- **Try not to use food to punish or reward your children**-Withholding food as a punishment may lead children to worry that they will not get enough food. For example, sending children to bed without any dinner may cause them to worry that they will go hungry. As a result, children may try to eat whenever they get a chance. Similarly, when foods, such as sweets, are used as a reward, children may assume that these foods are better or more valuable than other foods. For example, telling children that they will get dessert if they eat all of their vegetables sends the wrong message about vegetables.
- **Make sure your children's meals outside the home are balanced**- Pack their lunch to include a variety of foods. Also, select healthier items when dining at restaurants.
- **Pay attention to portion size and ingredients**- Read food labels and limit foods with trans fat. Also, make sure you serve the appropriate portion as indicated on the label.

References:

[www.webmd.com](http://www.webmd.com)

[www.choosemyplate.gov](http://www.choosemyplate.gov)