

Healthful Eating Tips for Children

Start Your Child on the Road to Good Health

From a young age, kids can learn to eat healthful food. By giving your children nutritious foods and the opportunity to get at least 60 minutes of physical activity most days, he or she is less likely to be at risk for obesity and other health problems.

Healthy eating focuses on fruits, vegetables, whole grains and fat-free or low-fat milk and milk products. It includes lean meats, poultry, fish, beans, eggs, and nuts and seeds.

It is also low in saturated fats, trans fats, cholesterol, salt and added sugars.

Help Your Child Eat a Rainbow of Foods Each Day

To help make healthful choices, your child should eat a variety of foods from all of the food groups.

Offer your child foods from a variety of colors. Vegetables are dark green, orange, yellow and purple; fruits are red, blue, green and yellow; meats and fish are white and red; beans are black, red and white; grains are brown and white; and smoothies can be almost any color, depending on the ingredients used!

How to Get Kids to Eat

Here are suggestions for how to get kids to eat a variety of foods.

■ Grain group

- Set a good example by eating whole grains with meals or as snacks.
- Make half of your grains whole.
- Let children select and help make a whole-grain side dish.
- Teach older children to read the ingredient lists on cereals or snack foods. Teach children to choose cereals and snacks that list whole grains at the top of the list.

■ Vegetable group

- Set a good example by eating vegetables with meals and as snacks.
- Let children decide on what vegetable to prepare or what goes into salads.
- If your children are old enough, let them help shop for, clean, peel or cut up vegetables.
- Let children pick out a new vegetable while shopping.
- Offer children cut-up vegetables as part of afternoon snacks.
- Try serving vegetables separately instead of mixed.

■ Fruit group

- Set a good example by eating fruits with meals or as snacks.
- Offer children a choice of fruits for lunch, snacks or both.

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- If your children are old enough, let them help shop for, clean, peel or cut up fruits.
- Let children pick out a new fruit while shopping.
- Decorate plates or serving dishes with fruit slices.
- Put some berries on cereal. (Make a smiley face with sliced bananas for eyes, raisins for a nose and an orange slice for a mouth.)
- Offer fruit instead of candy.
- Pack a juice box with 100% juice instead of soda or other sugar-sweetened drinks.
- Choose fruit options on restaurant menus.

■ Milk group

- Set a good example by drinking low-fat or fat-free milk with meals and as snacks.
- Make yogurt-fruit smoothies in the blender.
- Offer flavored yogurt for a dessert or snack.
- Make pudding with low-fat or fat-free milk.
- Top casseroles, soups, stews or vegetables with shredded low-fat cheese.
- Add low-fat or fat-free milk instead of water to oatmeal and hot cereals.
- If your child has lactose intolerance (sensitivity to dairy products), try giving him or her lactose-free milk, soy milk, almond milk or rice milk fortified with calcium, vitamin A and vitamin D.
- If your child has a milk allergy, try giving him or her soy milk, almond milk or rice milk fortified with calcium, vitamin A and vitamin D.

■ Meat and beans group

- Set a good example by eating lean meats and beans with meals or as snacks.
- Offer a variety of meats, poultry and fish. Include turkey, chicken, pork tenderloin, round steaks, top sirloin, arm roasts, salmon and trout.
- Prepare meat by trimming all visible fat. Broil, grill, roast, poach or boil the meat or poultry.
- Offer a variety of foods that include beans. Try bean-based soups, baked beans, black bean enchiladas, rice and beans, or hummus on pita bread.
- Add nuts to salads, low-fat ice cream or yogurt or side dishes. Be sure to chop nuts so they are not a choking hazard.

Oils are not a food group but they are important for good health.

- Use oils that come from plants such as canola, olive, peanut, avocado, safflower or sunflower.
- Offer foods naturally high in oils such as nuts, olives, some fish and avocados. Be sure to chop nuts and cut olives so they are not a choking hazard.
- Avoid using butter, lard and shortening when cooking.

Limit sodas, treats, sweets and any foods that have added sugar. They provide empty calories and few nutrients.

Also limit fast food, fried foods and commercially prepared snacks. Eating too many of these foods can cause health problems.

Information adapted from the Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2015, U.S. Department of Agriculture.
 See myplate.gov for more information.