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# Kids and Food: 10 Tips for Parents

It's no surprise that parents might need some help understanding what it means to eat healthy. From the MyPlate food guide to the latest food fad, it can be awfully confusing.

The good news is that you don't need a degree in nutrition to raise healthy kids. Following some basic guidelines can help you encourage your kids to eat right and maintain a healthy weight.

Here are 10 key rules to live by:

1. **Parents control the supply lines.** You decide which foods to buy and when to serve them. Though kids will pester their parents for less nutritious foods, adults should be 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 at home. 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. **From the foods you offer, kids get to choose what they will eat or whether to eat at all.** Kids need to have some say in the matter. Schedule regular meal and snack times. 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 buy and serve.

3. **Quit the "clean-plate club."** Let kids stop eating when they feel they've had enough. Lots of parents grew up under the clean-plate rule, but that approach doesn't help kids listen to their own bodies when they feel full. When kids 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 variety. Likes and dislikes begin forming even when kids are babies. You may need to serve a new food on several different occasions for a child to accept it. Don't force a child to eat, but offer a few bites. With

older kids, ask them to try one bite.

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 kids try new foods and they might surprise you with their willingness to experiment. You can start by letting them try a little of whatever you ordered or ordering an appetizer for them to try.

6. **Drink calories 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 to 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 dinner, kids naturally place more value on the cupcake than the broccoli. Try to stay neutral about foods.

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

9. **Kids do as you do.** Be a role model and eat healthy yourself. When trying to teach good eating habits, try to set the best example possible. Choose nutritious snacks, eat at the table, and don't skip meals.

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, they'll find more active things to do. And limiting "screen time" means you'll have more time to be active together.

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