

Diet and Children: There is a Connection

Good nutrition is essential to the growing bodies, minds, and characters of young children. How can we, in the ever-increasing pace of life, provide healthy meals for children and teach them lifelong healthy eating habits?

Start by choosing healthy food. Buy and eat food as close to its natural state as possible. Fresh, locally-grown fruit and vegetables may be the best, but canned or frozen are nutritionally acceptable if there is not a high sugar or salt content. An added bonus is that frozen or canned foods are quicker to use, for example in smoothies, soups, or stir-fried dishes.

Choose whole grain products such as whole grain cereals, pastas, brown or red rice, and other favorites. While dried beans may seem time-consuming to prepare, they can be made in large quantities and frozen for later use and are a very economical food choice. Adhere to a diet rich in fresh fruits, nuts, grains, and vegetables. When you do buy packaged foods, check the packaging labels for simple ingredients that you recognize and can pronounce. Avoid foods with added sugars and chemical dyes.

It is also important to find ways of introducing children to variety. If your children are resistant to new foods, remember to keep mealtime positive. Offer lots of different food choices and encourage your child to try them. Don't get into a power struggle.

Careful planning and preparation of meals is important. The following suggestions will help you serve your children nutritious meals:

- **Serve a variety of foods.** Serve different kinds of foods throughout the week. Prepare the same food differently (you could serve cauliflower raw, cooked, mashed, or with different seasonings or sauces). Try

new foods as a family. Explore different cultures or try food with different colors (try yellow carrots or blue potatoes).

- **Keep trying!** According to research it may take 10 or more tries for a child to learn to accept a new food. Pair a small portion of a new food with something your child already likes.
- **Set a good example.** Kids will be more likely to try something if you are eating it. Eat together as a family.
- **Get your child involved.** Let your child choose if you should cook carrots or broccoli for supper or if you should bake zucchini bread or banana bread. Your child can help wash vegetables, stir a dressing, or mix a salad.
- **Make it fun.** Kids love dipping, so give them hummus, unflavored yogurt, or peanut butter to dip veggies or whole grain crackers into for a healthy snack.
- **Reduce Portion Size.** It is easy to give children too much food. With new foods, give just a spoonful. When they are full, let them stop eating, even if there's food left on the plate.
- **Serve Smart Snacks.** Very young children usually need to eat smaller portions more often. They may sometimes skip adult mealtimes. Make a scheduled snack time. Serve healthy foods like fruits and vegetables and whole grain baked goods instead of cookies, chips, and other "snack" foods.



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IN THE BIBLE

Then God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food."

Genesis 1:29 NIV

"Do everything for the glory of God, even your eating and drinking."

1 Corinthians 10:31, TLB

PLANT-BASED DIET MYTHS

- All plant-based diets are about the same.
- There are very few vegetarians.
- A diet without meat is nutritionally deficient.
- Once can't possibly get enough protein without meat and/or milk and eggs.
- Certain combinations of foods have to be eaten at the same meal to get the right amino acids.
- All vegetarian diets are low in fat.
- Vegetarian diets are dull and boring.
- Vegetarian diets can cure cancer and heart disease.

Learn the facts at sdada.org/plant.htm

LEARN MORE ONLINE

- Choose My Plate: Nutrition Resources
choosemyplate.gov
- Eat Right: American Dietetic Association
eatright.org
- Good Eating Guidelines
sdada.org/eatingwell.htm
- Kid's Health: Nutrition Topics
kidshealth.org/parent/nutrition_center
- Nutrition for Everyone
cdc.gov/nutrition/everyone/resources
- We Can! Help your Family Eat Right
nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/obesity/wecan/eat-right/index.htm
- Nourish Interactive: Tools for a Healthy Family
nourishinteractive.com/nutrition-tools-healthy-family
- Nutritional comparison of fresh, frozen, and canned fruits and vegetables
mealtime.org/uploadedFiles/Mealtime/Content/ucdavis-studyexecutivesummary.pdf

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