

FitFUTURE

Strategies for
Better Living.

Eating Well Together

5 Tips for Making Healthy Eating a Family Affair

There are many things that parents can do to help children develop healthy eating habits. From purchasing healthy foods to planning family meals, you can make healthy eating a reality in your home.

Here are five tips to help you on your way:

1. Do not skip meals

Skipping meals will cause your child's metabolic rate to slow down and will most likely cause him or her to overeat later on. Skipping meals, particularly before or during the school day will certainly effect his/her academic performance.

2. Make a plan

By planning your family's meals, you are more likely to include all food groups. Without planning, you may find yourself in a situation in which you are very hungry with no easily available healthy food choices.

3. Allow your children to help

Include children when making some food decisions. For example, let him/her choose the vegetable or the type of salad dressing for the evening meal. Ask your child to choose which fruits you will buy at the Farmer's market—they can't go wrong, and they will feel good about being asked to make decisions for the family. This will get them interested in food and nutrition, and

feel like they have a valuable role in family decision-making. Children who are engaged in planning or preparing meals are more likely to eat healthy foods and are more willing to try new foods.

4. Eat a balanced diet, rich in plant foods

Plant foods include grains, vegetables, fruit, nuts, beans, lentils, seeds and oils, such as olive or canola oil. For children three to five years old, provide 1 cup of fruit, 1 cup of vegetables and 3 to 4 grain servings daily. Increase these quantities to 1½ to 2 cups of fruits and vegetables and 4 to 6 grain servings for children from the age of six until puberty. From there, at least 1½ cups of fruits, 2 cups of vegetables and 6 servings of grains should be consumed daily. The USDA Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommend that all Americans over the age of two vary their protein intake by eating more protein-rich plant foods (beans, lentils, nuts, seeds). Plant oils in your

diet should primarily come from healthy foods, including avocado, nuts, seeds, olives and nut butters. For specific food group recommendations based on age, gender and activity level, visit www.mypyramid.gov.

5. Provided healthy snacks

Children need to snack. Eliminate sugary snacks and processed foods from your child's everyday meals and snacks – They should be "occasional" foods. Instead, substitute snacks like nuts, seeds, fruit, peanut butter, vegetables, popcorn or high fiber cereal. Avoid giving children soda, and other sweetened drinks, as they contain empty calories and offer zero nutritional benefit. Children should be drinking water, fat-free or low-fat milk, 100% fruit or vegetable juice.

Sources:
MyPyramid.gov
<http://www.mypyramid.gov>

