

Building Blocks Of Good Health

It's really not hard to eat right. Learning how to do so is one of the most important things we can do as parents. Quite frankly, as Americans we feed our pets better than we do our children.

Bad food offers little energy, causing less activity, leading to laziness, which can cause depression, which makes one eat more bad food. Food can either make your child feel happy, content and energized, or it can make them feel tired, jumpy, and irritable. As parents, we decide.

Traditional families that eat meals together are uncommon anymore. Dual-income households, single-parent families, divorced parents who share custody, and parents who work non-traditional hours all have lead to unstructured meal times with little time for food preparation. Without parents home to assist in food preparation, more convenience foods and fast foods are eaten, and snacking is more common.

Children need whole, natural foods to maintain good health. Foods such as unrefined ("whole") grains, beans, nuts, seeds, fruits and vegetables are essential. Dairy, egg and lean meats, while some would consider non-essential, are nevertheless a vital part of a healthy child's diet *in moderation*.

Once kids become overweight or obese, the odds of losing weight and keeping it off are very small, especially past the age of 8-12 years old. Therefore prevention is key, beginning at a young age (though it's never too late to start!). The following lists offer a few basic tips for eating right at home:

Building Good Meals

Lean meats (fish, turkey, skinless chicken), red meat as an occasional treat (if ever), minimize starchy vegetables (potatoes, corn, peas), offer salads with dark green lettuce or spinach leaves, oil & vinegar dressings or low-fat ranch in moderation, whole grains (pasta, tortillas, bread, steel-cut oats, barley soups), low-fat or non-fat dairy products (unless under age 2 years), fruits offered every meal, vegetables offered every lunch and dinner, beans & lentils, brown & wild rice (not white), eggs "three a week", non-dairy soups, cook with good oils (canola, olive, sunflower, safflower, peanut)

Building Good Snacks

Low-fat yogurt and string cheese (unless under age 2 years), fresh fruits & vegetables, trail mix (sunflower & pumpkin seeds, unsalted nuts, and dried fruits), salsa or guacamole (without sour cream) with baked chips or pita bread, hummus with pita bread, granola bars made with unsaturated fat, unbuttered pretzels, low-sugar cereals (Kix, original Cheerios), whole-wheat low-fat crackers with low-fat peanut butter or low-fat cheese, low-fat peanut butter on whole wheat toast, fig bars, ginger snaps, animal crackers, baked potato chips (occasionally), frozen 100% fruit bars, small whole-wheat bagels with light cream cheese, low-sugar zucchini or carrot-oatmeal breads.

Variety is not only the spice of life, it's the spice of a healthy diet. Kids become bored quickly. Make faces out of the food. Use cookie cutters to make interesting shapes. Offer small dishes of dips. The more fun the meal, the more likely the child is to eat it!

Did You Know?

Americans have lost control of portion sizes. Given that you are what you eat, it's no wonder that jumbo portion sizes are producing jumbo Americans.

Tips to reduce portion size inflation include:

- No more "Clean Plate Club"
- Let child be done if "full"
- Serve portion size of entree & side dishes as big as the child's hand.
- Use smaller plates to make portion sizes look bigger
- Read labels carefully to know what constitutes a "serving size"
- Slow down between bites. Talk with each other. This allows the brain to better recognize when the stomach is full
- Take home leftovers from restaurants. Most restaurant portion sizes are really two meals
- Buy smaller bread