



Ways we can help kids learn to eat right

August marks Kids Eat Right™ Month. During this month, the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics highlights ways to support children and families to build healthier eating behaviors and more active lifestyles. Building healthy habits together gives children valuable skills to use in the future. Try out one of these ideas for building healthy family eating habits.

Create mealtime routines. Plan consistent days and times to have meals and snacks together. Think about how you can make the routine special and simple. It might be where you sit, the topics you talk about, or the types of food or drink served. By sitting down together and eating meals that include vegetables and fruit, you are role modeling healthy behaviors that can encourage children to eat the same foods. Don't forget to include washing hands as part of the routine.

Get children involved. No matter the age of a child, there are ways to get them involved in meal planning, preparation, or cleanup. Ask children for input while meal planning or making the grocery list. Take children to the store and allow them to pick out a new or favorite vegetable or fruit. Set them up with age-appropriate tasks in the kitchen that will help get a meal or snack on the table. This could include anything from setting the table to measuring ingredients. Cleanup is also a great way to get children involved. Have them clear the table or help with dishes.

Allow children to decide whether to eat or how much. It can be uncomfortable to see a mostly untouched plate at the end of the meal. But it is normal for children's appetites to vary widely throughout the day and over the course of a week, particularly young children. Instead of pressuring children to eat more, take a deep breath and ask them how their tummy or stomach feels. Trust they will eat when they are hungry.

Explore a variety of tastes and textures. We often hear variety is the spice of life. But new foods and flavors can be scary. We need to expose children (and ourselves) to new or different foods a number of times so that they can learn to like them. Exploring new tastes and textures together can make the experience more fun. Consider pairing new foods with trusted favorites. This also makes it less scary.

Developing and practicing healthy eating habits is a lifelong journey and work in progress. It is never too early or too late to get children involved in practices that support healthy eating. The more they get to practice, the more confident they will feel about skills that support healthy eating.

References

Ellis, E. (2021, January 12). *Make resolutions stick: Focus on family*. Kids eat right, Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. <https://www.eatright.org/health/lifestyle/seasonal/make-resolutions-stick-focus-on-family>

Source: Courtney Luecking, Extension Specialist for Nutrition and Health

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