

## How to get your kids to eat fruits and vegetables

By Emily Walker, MS, LDN, RD

Most people know the many benefits of an eating plan filled with fruits and vegetables, but getting your kids to eat them can sometimes be challenging. Still, it is important to give them good healthy eating habits early in their lives, because, as part of a healthy diet, a high intake of fruits and vegetables can help prevent many chronic illnesses, such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease. In addition, fruits and vegetables are naturally low in calories and rich in vitamins and minerals.

Fiber-containing fruits and vegetables help also provide a feeling of fullness without a lot of calories. For example, yellow fruits and vegetables, such as oranges, carrots, and sweet potatoes, contain Vitamin A, which works to keep eyes and skin healthy and helps to protect against infection. Vitamin C, found primarily in citrus fruits, promotes wound healing and maintains health of teeth and gums while also aiding in iron absorption. Even so, fruits and vegetables are not the most popular foods among children.

It is your job, as a parent, to offer and provide healthy choices at mealtime as well as snack time. It helps to think like a child when you're shopping for foods your kids might like. Purchase brightly colored vegetables that appeal to a child's eye. At home, have fruits readily available where your child can see them and reach for them. Slicing bananas or another more colorful fruit on cereal is a great way to squeeze in extra nutrients at breakfast. Serve fruit in a fancy dish as a dessert to satisfy a sweet tooth.

To encourage eating healthy, give your child kitchen duty, but make it fun. Children are more likely to eat raw vegetables as a snack if they help to prepare a dipping sauce. They also enjoy finger foods, so pair some of your child's favorite protein sources with fruits and vegetables. Offer them peanut butter with celery sticks, yogurt with strawberries, or cheese with apples. Put unfamiliar foods on your child's plate next to a food that is familiar and well-liked. Don't expect him or her to eat very much, but give them credit for trying. Remember that serving sizes are much smaller for children. Every parent is a role model for his child to imitate. A child is more willing to try a new food if he or she sees you enjoying that food.

Meal time is important for the family. Develop a routine of eating at about the same time each day. Set an attractive table, and then remove all distractions, such as TV or radio. Take the time to sit at the table and eat with your child. Talk directly to him and ask questions about his day, trying to make him feel comfortable and relaxed. Keep things peaceful by not arguing or fussing at your child during meals, and above all else, listen to him. An atmosphere made up of your love and attention will go a long way in helping him eat his fruits and vegetables.

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