

Tips for Parents to Promote Healthy Nutritional Habits

1. **Be a role model.** Parents can make subtle lifestyle changes to help their kids (and themselves) be healthier. Don't order french fries if you don't want your kids ordering french fries. Don't buy Oreos if you don't want your kids sneaking a few of them from the cookie jar. Begin an exercise regimen of your own and gradually try to include the whole family.
2. **Make eating an activity in itself and eat meals as a family.** Kids, especially overweight kids, should not eat while watching TV, riding in a car, or walking through the kitchen. They should sit down just to eat, enjoy the meal, and then get up and do something else fun. Try to make mealtimes pleasant with conversation and sharing, not a time for scolding or arguing. If mealtimes are unpleasant, children may try to eat faster to leave the table as soon as possible. They then may learn to associate eating with stress.
3. **Try not to 'love' with food.** Instead of rewarding your children with snacks, teach them to use food for energy. Model alternative ways of celebrating. Perhaps spend some quality time with them taking a walk, going to the bowling alley, playing a game of cards, or going on a long bike ride.
4. **Increase your family's physical activity.** Reduce the amount of time you and your family spend in sedentary activities, such as watching television or playing video or computer games. There is a clear link between television time - especially when combined with eating - and obesity. Children should not have televisions in their bedrooms, and all kids should limit television, video, or computer game time to no more than an hour or two a day. Take the stairs instead of the elevator.
5. **Focus on positive goals.** Overweight children should focus on achieving goals they want to achieve. They may set their sights on running laps with, instead of behind, the class, or being able to bike for more than 20 minutes without getting tired. It's much better to choose these kind of positive goals than focusing on more negative sounding goals like losing weight.
6. **Take small steps as a family.** Substitute fruit in place of dessert, rather than omit desserts altogether. Don't pick up fast food as often. Get up to change the television channel instead of using the remote. Park the car a little farther away.
7. **Plan healthy meals.** If you are unsure about how to select and prepare a variety of foods for your family, consult a physician or registered dietitian for nutrition counseling. While it is important to be aware of the fat, salt, and sugar content of the foods you serve, all foods-even those that are high in fat or sugar-have a place in the diet, in moderation.
8. **Plan for snacks.** Continuous snacking may lead to overeating, but snacks that are planned at specific times during the day can be part of a nutritious

diet, without spoiling a child's appetite at mealtimes. You should make snacks as nutritious as possible, without depriving your child of occasional chips or cookies, especially at parties or other social events. Below are some ideas for healthy snacks.

Healthy Snacks

- Fresh, frozen, or canned vegetables and fruit served either plain or with low fat or fat-free cheese or yogurt.
 - Dried fruit, served with nuts or sunflower or pumpkin seeds.
 - Breads and crackers made with enriched flour and whole grains, served with fruit spread or fat-free cheese.
 - Frozen desserts, such as nonfat or low fat ice cream, frozen yogurt, fruit sorbet, popsicles, water ice, and fruit juice bars.
9. **Carefully cut down on the amount of fat in your family's diet.** Reducing fat is a good way to cut calories without depriving your child of nutrients. Simple ways to cut the fat in your family's diet include eating low fat or nonfat dairy products, poultry without skin and lean meats, and low fat or fat-free breads and cereals. Making small changes to the amount of fat in your family's diet is a good way to prevent excess weight gain in children: however, major efforts to change your child's diet should be supervised by a health professional. In addition, fat should not be restricted in the diets of children younger than 2 years of age. After that age, children should gradually adopt a diet that contains no more than 30 percent of calories from fat by the time the child is about 5 years old.
10. **Guide your family's choices rather than dictate foods.** Make a wide variety of healthful foods available in the house. This practice will help your children learn how to make healthy food choices.