

Make Healthy Eating a Family Goal

Family meals are a comforting ritual for both parents and kids. Children like the predictability of family meals and parents get a chance to catch up with their kids. Kids who take part in regular family meals are also:

- more likely to eat fruits, vegetables and grains
- less likely to snack on unhealthy foods
- less likely to use drugs or alcohol and are more likely to perform better in school.

What counts as a family meal? Any time you and your family eat together — whether it's takeout food or a home-cooked meal with all the trimmings. Strive for nutritious food and a time when everyone can be there. This may mean eating dinner a little later to accommodate a child who's at sports practice or setting aside time on the weekend, when everyone's time may be more flexible.

Be a Role Model

Kids will follow the lead of the adults they see every day. By eating fruits and vegetables, and not overindulging in the less nutritious stuff, you'll be sending the right message without saying a word!

Another way to be a good role model is to limit portions and not overeat. At the table, talk about being full. You might say, "This is delicious, but I'm full, so I'm going to stop eating." Similarly, parents who are always dieting or complaining about their bodies may foster these same negative feelings in their kids.

Don't Battle Over Food

Well-intentioned parents might find themselves bargaining or bribing kids to eat healthy foods. A better strategy is to give kids some control as to what they eat (while you control what healthy foods they have access to). Here are some other helpful ideas:

- Establish a predictable meal schedule. Kids and adults alike are less prone to eat mindlessly, if they know when to expect the next meal or snack.
- Don't force kids to clean their plates. Doing so teaches kids to override feelings of fullness.
- Avoid using dessert as a bribe for eating their meal. And, don't use food as a way of showing love.
- Encourage children to try at least one bite of something new.

Get Kids Involved

Most kids enjoy deciding what to make for their lunch or dinner. Some might even want to help shop for ingredients and prepare the meal. Involving kids at a young age teaches them how to make healthy food selections when they're out on their own. In the kitchen, select age-appropriate tasks so your child can play a part without getting injured or feeling overwhelmed. And at the end of the meal, don't forget to praise the chef!

For more information about good nutrition and the FDA nutrition recommendations go to <http://www.mypyramid.gov>.

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The Wellness Committee welcomes your comments & suggestions.
