



# Healthy Eating Hints for Kids

## Patient and Family Education

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### How can I help my child eat healthier?

- **Kids do better with routine:** Eat your meals at regular times. If family meals are at different times, your child may come to have poor eating habits. If your child can't count on a regular mealtime, he may overeat at one meal, or snack on fattening foods between meals. Irregular eating keeps him from "tuning in" to his body's natural cues for hunger and satisfaction. Do not skip meals.
- **Eat as a family:** Sit down and eat with your child. Involve them in helping to prepare meals. Talk about how healthy eating can help the whole family. Turn off the TV, radio and cell phones while you are together. They need your attention.
- **Plan meals and snacks:** Healthy eating takes time and energy. It is important to feed your child before he is hungry. Not planning meals may lead to feeding them whatever is easiest instead of what is healthy. Prepare meals at home and eat out less often.
- **Drink more water:** Teach your child to drink water when he's thirsty instead of juices, sodas, sweet tea, or sugary powdered drink mixes. The extra sugar and calories in these drinks can keep your child from eating a healthy meal later. Also, drinks with a lot of sugar can lead to weight gain, and tooth decay.
- **Keep it simple:** Limit your child's choices at meals. Offer him several healthy choices of foods including some you *know* he likes, then let him decide which of the choices he wants to eat. If you've prepared meatloaf and vegetables for dinner, don't let your child eat a bowl of cereal instead. This can turn him into a "picky" eater.
- **Limit temptations:** Avoid having a lot of junk foods such as chips, cookies and candy around the house; these are high in calories and fat. It is hard to keep from eating these foods if they are always around.
- **Limit TV time:** Set limits on how much time your child spends watching TV and playing video games. Less than 2 hours daily is advised. Spending too much time just sitting can lead to weight gain. Teach your child to enjoy physical activity by encouraging them to play outside or by joining an athletic team. Kids need at least 1 hour of physical activity outside of school each day. Be a good role model for your child by taking stairs instead of an elevator or picking a parking space further away from a store entrance.
- **Make changes you can live with:** Avoid trying to change everything about your child's eating habits overnight. This will just frustrate you, your child, and the rest of your family. Focus on one or two problem areas in your family's eating habits and work on improving them together.

### Are there any foods my child should avoid?

- **There are no "forbidden foods":** Focus on making healthy food choices instead of branding foods "good" and "bad". It's okay to have a sweet treat once in awhile, but make sure treats are balanced with healthy meals and snacks.

### In case of an urgent concern or emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room right away.

This is general information and is not specific medical advice for your child. Always consult your child's doctor or other healthcare provider if you have any questions or concerns about the care or health of your child.

# Healthy Eating Hints for Kids, continued

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Is there a certain diet my child should follow?

- **Say “No!” to diets:** Temporary “fixes” don’t work! Think of healthy eating as a lifestyle change for the whole family. Lifelong gains can be achieved by making small changes in your family’s eating habits.

How can I be a good role model for my child?

- Improve your own eating habits and your child’s will follow. Eat healthier and your child will be more likely to do so as well.
- **Remain positive:** You *can* help your child live a happy, healthy life!

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