



HOW TO INSTILL *Healthy Habits for Your Children*

Healthy eating and physical activity are essential for children of any age. They can have many health benefits for children, including promoting heart health and improving mood. Although most of us know that it's a good idea to eat healthy food and move more, it isn't always easy to do. Children aren't likely to change their diet and activity habits on their own. It's up to you to make it easier for your family to make healthy choices.

PARENTAL ROLES

Parents are very important in terms of arranging an environment and setting a model for healthy or unhealthy behavior. Parents bring foods into the house. They control how much time a child can watch TV. They control what kinds of social activities are paired with foods. And kids learn a huge amount about eating and physical activity from watching and imitating their parents.

While it's never too late to start making healthy changes in your family, research suggests that the earlier your kids

learn healthy behaviors, the better. Getting young ones to accept fruits and vegetables can be a challenge, but some parents give up too quickly if a child rejects a new food. Research suggests that the more times you offer a food, the more likely a child will be to warm up to it. Some experts note that kids typically have to taste a new food 9 to 15 times to begin to like it.

If your child doesn't like a new food right away, stay positive and keep trying over time. Encouraging kids to take just one bite of a new food can help. But avoid creating conflicts and stress over it. Trying a new food can be exciting and also stressful in general. Studies show that kids are more likely to try a new food if they're eating in a setting that's relaxing and pleasant.

Children under the age of three tend to stop eating on their own when they're full. But after age three, the more you put on their plate, the more they'll eat. So make sure to give your kids child-size portions.

FIND TEACHABLE MOMENTS

Take opportunities to teach young children about feelings of fullness. If your child asks for another helping, instead of saying, 'No, honey, you've had enough,' try saying something like, 'You must really be hungry tonight,' to raise their awareness of their feelings. Or when they stop eating, say, 'Oh, you must feel full now,' to help teach about hunger and feeling satisfied.

Several studies show that parents can effectively influence healthy behaviors by talking in a positive way or avoiding certain situations altogether. Instead of telling your children, 'No, you can't have any more cookies,' just keep cookies out of the house altogether. It's easier to create an environment in the home where there's limited access to unhealthy foods and lots of access to healthy foods."

Experts recommend that most kids get at least an hour of moderate to vigorous physical activity each day. Parents can help by limiting TV and computer time to no more than one or two hours per day.

When it comes to food and physical activity, what you say and do around your children can have a lasting effect. Work together as a family to make healthy habits easy and fun.

HELP KIDS FORM HEALTHY HABITS

- » Be a role model. Eat healthy family meals together. Walk or ride bikes instead of watching TV or surfing the Web.
- » Make healthy choices easy. Put nutritious food where it's easy to see. Keep balls and other sports gear handy.
- » Focus on fun. Play in the park, or walk through the zoo or on a nature trail. Cook a healthy meal together.
- » Limit screen time. Don't put a TV in your child's bedroom. Avoid snacks and meals in front of the TV.
- » Check with caregivers or schools. Make sure they offer healthy foods, active playtime, and limited TV or video games.
- » Change a little at a time. If you drink whole milk, switch to 2% milk for a while, then try even lower fat milks. If you drive everywhere, try walking to a nearby friend's house, then later try walking a little farther.



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