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MEALS AND SNACKS

In today's world of fast foods, picky eaters, and time-pressed parents, eating healthy becomes somewhat of a challenge. But the good news is, with a little preplanning it does not have to be.

Creating healthy children today, promotes healthy adults of tomorrow.

MEALTIME FOR GROWING CHILDREN

- The picky eater dilemma: When it comes to picky eaters, toddlers take first prize. If there is one piece of advice that can be given it would be to not make meal and snack time a challenge. True to their stage of growth and development, toddlers are experimenting with taking control of their environments. What better control than to pick and choose what they will and will not eat! Within reason, allow them that choice. They *will* eat what they need. Encourage them to try each thing on their plate, but do not make it a fight to the finish. Know that it takes most children 8-10 presentations of a new food before they will openly accept it. When someone says a child will not eat something, it is usually an adult talking. If we make it fun and interesting, kids will try almost anything.
- So . . . Make it fun! If the adult in their world make this time fun, stress free, and appealing, young children will participate with enthusiasm. Eat the new foods yourself; children love to imitate!
- Relax: Depending on age, size and activity level, toddlers need between 1,000-1,400 calories a day. It is perfectly normal for them to be ravenous one day and shun food the next. Don't worry if a child's diet is not up to par every day as long as he or she seems satisfied and is getting a well-rounded diet.
- Provide variety. Children develop a natural preference for the foods they enjoy the most, so it does become a challenge to ensure that your child's diet is an nutritious and wholesome as possible even while occasionally allowing some of their favorite treats.
- Make good choices: Avoid processed foods like canned soup, frozen dinners, and pre-made lunch products, such as the ever popular "Lunchables," to name a few. These foods contain hidden sodium (salt) that quickly surpasses the recommended limit. Many fast food meals are also loaded with salt. Milligrams of sodium consumed per day should be less than 1,500 for one- to three-year-olds, 1,900 for four- to eight-year-olds, and 2,200 for nine- to thirteen-year-olds. Check the sodium content on the labels of processed foods before purchasing. If it appears that one "Lunchable" is going to provide more than one-third of your child's daily sodium limit, forego this processed food for a healthier, homemade lunch.
- Keep servings size appropriate: Use small plates that are child oriented. For the picky eater, sometimes a compartmentalized plate is helpful. Serve only one to two spoons full of each food being offered so the child is not overwhelmed at the amount of food presented to them. *Over* serving does one of two things — encourages the little

overeaters to *overindulge* and makes the picky eater feel inundated by food and not wanting to try anything at all. (A good rule of thumb for toddler serving sizes: One tablespoon per year of age).

- **Know when enough is enough:** Allow children to consume what they will and allow small second servings if they request it. Do not insist they eat all of any one food or “clean their plate!” Never use food as a reward or bribe.
- **Make it appealing:** Our eyes and nose are the first lines of satiety, and for children this is tantamount. Present foods that are colorful and appealing to look at, and chances are they will at least do a taste test. Presenting veggies displayed in animated forms such as flowers, fish, happy faces, etc., usually will draw some positive attention.

SNACK TIME

Children need a lot of energy while they are growing. Often they are unable to get enough from three square meals a day. Instead of fighting them to “eat more” at mealtime, offer them choices of healthy snacks between meals. A few choices include:

- Raisins. They are loaded with antioxidants and high in carbohydrates (an immediate source of energy), high in fiber and iron, and an easy portable snack.
- Frozen fruit bars. The best of these contains chunks of real fruit. They are a great fat-free summer refresher.
- Baked chips. A one-ounce serving of Kettle Crisps for example gets only 15 of its 110 calories from fat. Baked tortilla chips are another good choice.
- Nuts and seeds. Nuts are high in fat but it is the good variety of fat. They are also loaded with protein and essential vitamins and minerals, plus they are wonderfully filling. Make ahead a trail mix of nuts, sunflower seeds, raisins and low-fat granola to have on hand for that quick healthy snack for the active youngster.

MAKING IT INTERESTING!

With make-ahead preparation you will have healthy snacks available when children need them, and including the child in the preparation makes it even more interesting to them, and more likely to be consumed.

- **Rate the plate contests:** Set out foods and have children choose their favorites. A plate with varied cheeses, one with varieties of veggies, another with fruits, grains, etc. Allow them to rate their favorites and then you can choose from these for future snack options.
- **Aiding and abetting:** Have kids help to make fun snacks such as using cookie cutters to cut cheese and fruit shapes and skewer them on to pretzel sticks for immediate consumption. Or cut up carrot and celery sticks and allow children to place small amounts in snack size baggies to keep in their snack section of the refrigerator. Mix berries in natural yogurt, place in a paper cup with a craft stick in the center and freeze.
- **A place of their own:** Designating a section of the refrigerator for kids snacks where anything in that area is ready to be enjoyed by them alone, is also helpful.

- Sweet treats: Do not ban sweets entirely. Having a no sweets rule is an invitation for cravings and overindulging when given the chance. Give recipes a makeover by simply using less sugar or adding fruits and vegetables to baked goods, or adding extra veggies to soups and stews.

DIETARY GUIDELINES FOR TODDLERS AND YOUNG CHILDREN

Fruits & Vegetable: Two servings each, per day. These may be given as snacks such as apples or carrots. Also try adding extra vegetables to soups.

Whole Grains: Four daily servings. Can include multigrain pancakes or multigrain toast for breakfast, a sandwich on whole wheat for lunch and brown rice or another whole grain as part of the evening meal.

Milk & Dairy: Three servings, or one pint of whole milk per day. Cheeses, yogurt and milk puddings are useful alternatives.

Protein: Two servings per day. Encourage child to try a variety of proteins, such as turkey, eggs, fish, chicken, lamb, baked beans and lentils.

Vitamins & Minerals: Check with your child's doctor to be certain their diet is adequately meeting the recommended nutritional needs for their age group.

KIDS FRIENDLY JUNK FOOD ALTERNATIVES

Instead of this

Try this

French fries	Baked fries grilled in the oven and lightly salted.
Ice cream	Low-fat frozen yogurt; sorbet, fresh fruit smoothies.
Fried chicken	Baked or grilled chicken.
Doughnuts or pastries	Bagels, English muffins, home baked goods with less sugar/fat.
Chocolate-chip cookies	Graham crackers, fig bars, vanilla wafers, fruit and caramel dip.
Potato chips	Pretzels, unbuttered popcorn, baked potato chips, soy crisps.

When eating out with children try to steer them toward more healthy options.

- Avoid sodas — kids should drink water or milk instead.
- Avoid chicken nuggets — Unhealthy imposters of real chicken.

- Skip the fries — Consider taking along a bag of mini carrots, grapes, or other fruits and vegetables to have instead. This will add vitamins and fiber to the meal as well.
- Order the kid's meal with some substitutions — Children often love the kid's meal more for the fun box and toys than for the food. Ask to substitute healthier choices for the soda and fries.
- Opt for chicken or vegetables or spaghetti with tomato sauce in a sit-down restaurant, rather than a big plate of macaroni and cheese.

These are just a few suggestions that may help keep children on a healthy path to nutrition and weight maintenance. There are a multitude of healthy snack and meal ideas available on the internet as well as a number of books on the subject to assist you with plan-ahead ideas.

Resources and Additional Information:

Health Kids Snacks — www.dietriffin.com.

Quick and Healthy Snacks For Kids — www.babycenter.com.

Helping Your Kids Develop Healthy Eating Habits — www.helpguide.org.

www.mypyramid.gov