

## **HEALTHY KIDS**

### **Dealing with Picky Eaters- “ I don’t want it”**

Here are some tips to keep in mind:

1. *Earlier is better.*

It's important to expose your child to healthy fruits and vegetables at a young age. Food preferences that children develop in their early years remain fairly stable and are reflected by the food choices they make in later childhood.

2. *Be patient and keep trying.*

Parents who get discouraged by children who are picky eaters often stop trying to give them new foods, which could lead to future health problems. Research has shown that in most cases, parents can help their children learn to like new foods through multiple exposures (between 5 and 10) to new foods and opportunities to learn about food and eating. Just offer new foods often, asking your child to try a bite in a positive and supportive way. Although it doesn't always happen, studies have shown that children will eventually learn to like the new food.

3. *Be a role model.*

A recent study found that 2 and 3-year-old children's food preferences are significantly related to foods that their mothers liked, disliked, and never tasted. So, the more excitement and enjoyment you express about fruits and vegetables, the more likely your child will want to eat them too!

4. *Don't restrict certain foods.*

Research also shows that not allowing children to eat certain foods only raises their desirability for that food. So help children learn that healthy foods like fruits and vegetables are "all the time foods" that they can eat anytime, and that foods like candy and desserts are "sometimes foods" that they can eat once in a while.

5. *Make healthy foods available.*

As long as you keep healthy snacks like fruits and vegetables around, your child can learn to like and choose them!

6. *Prepare foods in healthy ways.*

Small modifications in the way you prepare meals and snacks can make a big difference in improving your child's diet: Bake instead of fry, choose foods with whole grain or whole wheat instead of refined grains, give your child water or low-fat or skim milk instead of juice or soda, etc.

7. *Make it fun!*

Snack and meal-time activities should be introduced and reinforced in creative, colorful and playful ways. There are suggestions below for some fun and easy ways you can make fruits and vegetables an all-time favorite with your child. While you do these activities, allow your child to explore the various properties of fruits and vegetables by touching, tasting, smelling and hearing. Don't forget to talk about how they are good for the body, too!

- Try something new. Allow your child to try a new fruit or vegetable. Jicama! Zucchini! Bok choy! Mango! Papaya! These foods may sound silly, but they taste great and they're good for you.
- Do a taste test or a crunch test! Dip carrots into three different flavors of low-fat dressing or try a crunch test with three different kinds of vegetables to see which vegetable crunches the loudest!

- Play a guessing game! Prepare several foods for your child to taste while he or she is blindfolded. See if your child can identify each food. Help your child use words to describe what he or she tastes, such as salty, sweet, crunchy, smooth, warm, cold, etc.
- Play "What can we make with this?" Talk about how a certain fruit or vegetable, such as an apple, is good for the body. Then, talk about the various foods they can make with an apple.
- Bake carrot or zucchini muffins together. Discuss how carrots have special vitamins that are really good for eyes.
- Where do foods come from? With your child, visit a farm to explore where foods come from and how they grow. Can you try planting your own fruit and vegetable? How about a tomato?
- Make a healthy snack. Have your child pick a variety of fruits to make a fruit salad. As he/she adds each new fruit to the bowl, talk about the colors of each fruit and how they help the body stay healthy in different ways.
- After grocery shopping, play a sorting game by grouping various fruits and vegetables by different categories - color, taste, texture, food group, etc.

### **Choosing Healthy Snacks**

"I want a snack!" Most parents know that phrase all too well. We may occasionally roll our eyes upon hearing it, but it is OK for kids to eat a little something between meals. In fact, snacks can play a big part in fulfilling a child's daily nutritional requirements.

The important thing is to provide children with nutritious snacks that don't undermine our primary goal of keeping them healthy and fit. Avoid foods that are fried, processed, too oily or too salty. And, definitely keep sugar to a minimum. If your child eats healthy snacks from the start, they'll likely continue to make good food choices throughout their lives.

As for serving sizes, young children don't need large portions. Many experts agree that servings should equal about one tablespoon of food for each year of a child's age. Enjoy serving them those small portions now, because your grocery bills will increase dramatically as they get older!

#### **Healthy Snack Ideas:**

- Crunchy vegetable sticks (carrots, celery) with low-fat ranch dip (for older preschoolers)
  - Nearly frozen applesauce
- Melon Melody: Watermelon, cantaloupe and honeydew with non-fat whipped cream
  - Ants on a Log: Peanut butter on celery with raisins
- Mud & Dirt: Low-fat pudding with crushed graham crackers mixed in
  - Peanut butter on half of a whole-wheat bagel
  - Whole-wheat crackers or whole-wheat tortilla with salsa
    - Hummus and pita wedges
- "Light" microwave popcorn with grated parmesan cheese (for children three years and older)
- Mini-pizzas: Half an English muffin covered with a tablespoon of tomato sauce, then topped with part-skim mozzarella cheese

### **Choosing and Buying Snacks**

- Buy only healthy snacks, such as fruits and vegetables.
- Before you go shopping, tell your children what behavior you expect and what, if any, snack they can expect.
  - Take snacks with you when you go to appointments or run errands.
    - Provide snacks that are easy to eat.
  - Use snacks to provide the food groups your children are missing during meals.
    - Make snacks small, then give seconds if the child asks for more.
- Decide what snacks you will allow, and when. Explain the rules to your child and stick to them.

## Motivating Kids to get fit

With childhood obesity increasing at staggering rates, parents and caregivers must play an active role in protecting children's health. Eating healthy foods is a key factor in maintaining their overall wellbeing.

But, this has to be balanced with regular physical activity.

Children who are physically active on a regular basis will reap enormous benefits. Studies have shown that they:

- Are less likely to become overweight
  - Have a decreased risk of developing type 2 diabetes
  - Have reduced blood cholesterol levels and lower blood pressure
- Have higher self-esteem and reduced incidences of depression and anxiety
  - Are more likely to build strong bones and muscles
  - Are more attentive in school

Now that we know why children need to be active, it's time to get them up and moving. Here's how:

1. **Focus on fun.** You don't have to call it "exercise," just consider it an activity. Find out which ones your child likes and encourage those.
2. **Limit TV and computer time.** The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends no more than "two hours of daily media exposure" for children ages two and older. When they are watching or clicking, make sure they take breaks and move around.
3. **Schedule play dates.** The key word here is "play." Have your child get together with a friend and play a game of tag, race down the block or kick a ball around.
4. **Get fit as a family.** Create some funny dance moves. Put up a net and shoot hoops. You could also visit a zoo, play miniature golf or enjoy other activities where a lot of ground is covered on foot.
5. **Choose fitness-oriented gifts.** For your child's next birthday, consider giving him or her a jump-rope, mini-trampoline, hula-hoop -- something that will encourage movement.
6. **Clean up.** Chores don't have to be a bore. Sing a silly song with your child as you both wipe tables and counters. See how long both of you can hold a funny face while folding and putting away clothes. Older kids can help wash the car. On a hot day, this can turn into water play.
7. **Skip the mall.** Go to the playground. Sure, most malls have kids' play areas. But, when the weather is nice, enjoy a local park or playground instead. Fresh air always does a body good; especially a little one.
8. **Be a model of fitness.** It's much easier to motivate kids to be active, if you lead an active lifestyle. Whether you follow a structured fitness program or are lucky to get in some morning stretches, let them see you moving. It will likely inspire them to do the same.
9. **Encourage walking or biking whenever feasible.** This is easy to accomplish if you live near stores, libraries or other places you visit regularly. If you live in a remote area, establish a safe route to tour on bike or on foot with your child.
10. **Be a fitness advocate at your child's school.** Do you know how much physical activity your child gets at school? Now's the time to find out. If you don't like the answer, gather support from other parents to enforce positive changes.