



Healthy Eating for Kids

Teaching kids healthy eating is not a lecture, it is a parental practice through which children observe and learn. Further, although kids may whine and squirm and even outright reject what's on the plate, parents must come to realize that being held hostage by childish control strategies only improperly empowers children and thus creates greater feeding difficulties in the long run.

It is the parents who are in control of what food comes into the house, how it is prepared and how it is served. Meal design, food purchases, preparation and service thus become the real feeding grounds for developing healthy eating by our kids as managed by parents.

Children can be involved in all the areas of meal design, food purchase, preparation and service – at parents and child's discretion. While children may be involved at any step along the way, it is up to the parent to direct the options available to the child so that decisions are made within a range of healthy choices.

If parents haven't managed the process of developing healthy eating habits, kids may come to think they are in charge or have more say than is appropriate. If this is the case, wresting control back from the hands of the child, to the parent can be a challenge. Parents must understand that kids will choose not necessarily what is best, but what is most enjoyable from ease of preparation to overly salty or sugary foods. When parents look to change their child's eating habits, they can expect objections and protests. Parents who give in to such behaviour only serve to teach their children that that behaviour pays off and thus the parent increases the likelihood that the child will continue to use those strategies whenever faced with things not to their liking. When parents seek to alter a child's direction, the parent must be able to withstand the objections and protest and hold their own ground. Thus the child eventually learns that the parent means business and that the inappropriate strategies are futile.

Here are some tips for managing children's healthy eating.

1. Depending on the age of the child, spend some time talking and constructing meal plans together. Remember though, parents guide the process and cannot be swayed or negotiated into poor decisions. Don't use a poor decision to reinforce a good one.
2. Parents and child can go shopping together. When purchasing fruits and vegetables, ask the grocery clerk

to help determine what is the freshest or ripest. Listen and learn with your child and go about smelling the produce and fruits together. Remember, it can't come into the house if you the parent don't buy it!

3. Unpack groceries together. This serves to teach your children the efforts involved in getting food from the store to home. Thank your child for their assistance. Let your child know how much they are appreciated.
4. Prepare snacks and meals together. Let the kids participate and have fun along the way. Think of meal preparation as a science experiment or art class. Wonder how flavours will go together or how things might look when cooked or put to the plate. Use the time to enjoy each other's company. This will be very new territory for many kids and parents alike. However, it remains the parent's responsibility to show their appreciation and love to their child during the process, regardless of how much or little the child actually participates. Their mere presence, for however long, is to be reinforced.
5. Finally, sit down and enjoy the eating together. Statistically, the more meals a family enjoys together, the better behaved and adjusted the children tend to be. Further, parents are more in touch with their children's lives and together they have better rapport. As a result of the better rapport, parents actually hold more influence with their children than do the children's peers. This becomes an essential element come the child's adolescence when parents seek to protect their kids from more serious social issues.

Throughout, remember that developing healthy eating habits is not a race or a destination. It is a process over time. Ignore the setbacks and build on each day's successes. Successes are there if you concentrate on finding them as opposed to being distracted by upsets.

Bon Appetite!

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