

Teaching Healthy Eating Habits

Children learn habits, both good and bad, at an early age. Demonstrating healthy eating habits early in your child's life will equip your child with some healthy life skills he/she can carry with him/her.

Healthy eating habits are more than just selecting healthy foods or having a healthy diet. Not only what your child eats, but also how much he/she eats, can affect his/her eating habits that are formed in childhood. Healthy diets also include portion control. Below are some tips parents can use while monitoring how much their child is eating.

- Model healthy eating habits for your child. If you're eating more than your fair share, your child may not understand why his/her servings are being limited.
- If your child is full, let him/her stop eating. Don't require that their plate be clean. Don't encourage overeating.
- Dinner time is not a race. Make sure your child takes time to eat his/her meals. Not only will your family be practicing healthy eating habits, but you will enjoy the sit down time you have together.
- Young children should eat servings that are about 2/3 the size of an adult's.

According to the USDA's Food Guide for Young Children, children aged 2-6 should have diets that include the following:

- 6 servings of grains
- 3 servings of vegetables
- 2 servings of fruits
- 2 servings of meats
- 2 servings of milk
- Limited amounts of fats and sweets

Finally, make daily eating or food preparation fun, learning experiences. Have your child help you while buying groceries. In the produce section of the grocery store, have your child look for a rainbow, fruits and vegetables, finding something in each of the colors of the rainbow. Try a new fruit, vegetable, or main dish each month. When appropriate, allow your child to assist you in making meals. Talk about the ingredients you're putting in the recipe.

If you start teaching your children about healthy eating habits now, they may be likely to practice them on their own as well.