

Tips for Good Nutrition



Exposure to stress can make a person more likely to have unhealthy eating habits. This can happen partly because lasting stress increases levels of the hormone cortisol in the body, as well as the “hunger hormone” ghrelin—both which serve to increase appetite. In addition, our bodies are more likely to crave sugars and fats during times of stress, as well as engage in other unhealthy lifestyle behaviors, like exercising less. Together, these habits can lead to obesity, mood and sleep problems, and other health issues. The good news is that knowing and doing a few simple things about good nutrition can help bodies and brains operate at their very best.

Consistent, healthy routines can help children feel safe and trusting of the world around them—and mealtime is one of a family’s most important daily routines. Here are some ways to encourage healthy eating habits:

- **Eat together as a family.**
Set aside a specific time for meals, and eat together as often as possible. Age doesn’t matter—even babies can join everyone at the family table! Mealtimes are a great opportunity to create strong family bonds by talking about what’s going on in our lives. Avoid screens (watching television and using cell phones) during mealtimes, try to avoid interruptions by phone calls, and use the time to talk, share, and connect.
- **Eat a healthy breakfast every day.**
Eating a healthy and complete breakfast helps your child start the day with good energy. Include fruit, protein, and whole grains when possible. Children and adults who eat breakfast daily are less likely to be overweight.

- **Serve lots of colorful vegetables and fruits.**
Choose fresh, frozen, or canned options (watch for added sugar). Think about adding these to foods your children already eat. Try slicing fruit into their cereal or adding greens to smoothies.
- **Offer whole grains**
(like brown rice and quinoa) or foods made of whole grains (like whole-grain pasta or 100% whole-wheat bread).
- **Serve healthy protein**
like fish, eggs, poultry, and plant-based options like beans, lentils, peas, nuts, and seeds when possible.
- **Drink water with each meal and snack.**
Help your child develop the habit of reaching for water first. Limit juices, soda, and sugary drinks.
- **Get your kids involved.**
Offer your child a choice between two healthy food options. For example, “Would you like an apple or an orange?” Involve your child in meal planning, shopping, and meal preparation. Cooking is a great way to teach your child basic kitchen skills, and it is a wonderful way to talk, laugh, and have special time together.



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