

Helping Your Child Eat Healthy for Life



Learning healthy habits today can help your child grow up strong and fit. As a parent, you can teach your child to make better food choices. There are also things you can let your child do on their own.

Goals to keep in mind

Keep these goals in mind when making food choices:

- **Balance and variety.** Balance means eating foods from each of the basic food groups. Variety means eating a wide range of the foods in each group. Eating a mix of foods helps to get the vitamins and minerals your child's body needs.
- **Moderation.** With moderation, all foods, including your child's favorites, can fit into a healthy eating plan. Moderation means avoiding too much of any one food or type of food. Don't make any foods forbidden. But limit foods such as sweets, chips, and other junk foods.

What you can do

Your part is to give your child healthy food choices. You can also teach by example. That means eating nutritious foods yourself. Your role is to:

- **Shop.** Buy many kinds of healthy foods. Include plenty of fruits and vegetables. Take your child along with you and let them pick out a new fruit or vegetable to try. Buying food can be expensive. Help is available. Learn more at the USDA website at [USDA website at www.nutrition.gov/topics/food-security-and-access/food-assistance-programs](http://www.nutrition.gov/topics/food-security-and-access/food-assistance-programs).
- **Prepare meals.** Make healthy, balanced meals at home. Ask your child to help. Age-appropriate tasks might include setting the table, measuring ingredients, stirring food together in a bowl, or using a plastic knife to slice soft fruit.
- **Serve foods.** Offer different kinds of healthy foods and flavors to your child at each meal. Try to make the meal colorful and fun.
- **Remove distractions.** Turn off the TV and put away cell phones and tablets. Pay attention to your child at the table.
- **Lead by example.** Your child watches you and wants to be like you. Show your kids how you want them to eat by eating well yourself.



What to let your child do

Your child's part is simple. Let your child choose which healthy foods to eat, and how much to eat at each meal. Your child's role is to:

- **Decide what to eat.** Let your child choose from different healthy foods at each meal. They may eat only the bread stick you served with a meal, and that's OK. Keep offering a variety of healthy foods at each meal.
- **Tell you when they are full.** Don't force your child to eat everything on their plate. Your child might eat a lot at some meals. At other meals, your child may not eat as much. This is normal. It balances out over time. Let children learn their own internal cues for hunger and fullness.
- **Taste a small amount of new foods.** Don't expect your child to eat a whole serving of a new food. But do ask your child to taste it. It may take 10 or more tries before your child likes a new food. Sooner or later, they may start choosing it without your prompting. Try offering a new food with another food your child enjoys.

When to talk with the healthcare provider

If your child has food allergies or other special needs, be sure to talk to their healthcare provider about what your child should eat.

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