



PARENTING POSTS

A newsletter for parents of kindergarten students.

Families and Food Choices

No single food has all the nutrients in the amounts needed for your child. Children need to eat a variety of healthful foods each day to meet their nutritional requirements. A child who appears tired, worn out or irritable may benefit from better eating habits. Young children need your guidance to learn about eating healthy foods in proper amounts. Here are some tips to encourage healthful eating habits.

Gardens and Grocery Stores

A growing interest in gardening has healthful foods popping up in containers, raised beds, backyard gardens and community plots. From apple to zucchini, a variety of vegetables and fruits offer great health benefits for children. Kids learn numerous things from planting, identifying, weeding, watering and generally caring for plants that produce their food. This type of learning promotes patience, memory, physical activity and small motor skills. Children reap even more benefits at harvest time as they pick, wash and eat healthful foods they have helped grow. Offer children vegetables and fruits daily as a snack before meals and at mealtimes.

Children also can learn to select healthful foods at the grocery store. Children who are taught to shop around the edge of a grocery store learn that fresh and frozen food items generally are around the perimeter of the store. Most of one's purchases should come from these areas. High-calorie, low-nutrition foods are usually on the inside aisles in cans (soda, etc.) and bags (chips, etc.), as well as freezers with highly processed "meals." How you shop at the grocery store will shape how children think about and select food items.

Kids and Kitchens

Children who are invited to help in the kitchen learn valuable math and social skills, as well as food and kitchen safety. Also, children can learn about appropriate portion sizes. When they are involved in growing, choosing and cooking, kids are more likely to try tasting a wider variety of foods.



Healthful Habits for Eating and Exercise

Children entering kindergarten may have a difficult time thinking about how their choices now will affect their health in the future. As a parent, you are responsible for teaching your child about nutritious food and exercise choices.

Salty and Sugary?

Salty and sugary snacks are often not the best choices for a child's health. When a child arrives home from school or comes in from play, he or she may appear tired or sluggish. Nutritious snacks can fill the need for something to eat without spoiling a child's appetite at meals.

Rethink snacks and treats to include food that may require a little more preparation but also will fulfill part of your family's nutritional requirements. Instead of trying to keep hungry kids out of the chips and cookies before dinner, ask your child to rinse some clean, raw vegetables from the refrigerator and arrange them on a plate as the appetizer. If your child fills up on vegetables before dinner, you won't mind that he or she skips dessert!

Another way to encourage healthful eating is to post a list of acceptable snacks for your child to choose. Some other snacks you may wish to try:

- Provide bite-sized frozen fruit pieces such as bananas, strawberries, blueberries, pineapple tidbits and melon pieces on warm days.
- Use whole-grain cereals as toppings for yogurt or as part of a trail mix with your favorite dried fruits and nuts.
- Serve unsweetened applesauce with a sprinkle of cinnamon and berry, nut or coconut toppers.
- String cheese offers a quick and healthful snack.
- Starting with a common food and adding new foods or varieties can help bridge the unknown for children.

Uninspired by your options?

Try looking at this site: www.choosemyplate.gov.

Stress Less Activity

Stress is part of everyone's life. Even young children! Try this activity with your child to help reduce stress and enjoy time together.

**Ask your child to teach you dance moves.
Hold a two-minute dance party.**



Go here for more information on this and other topics.

www.ndsu.edu/extension

Fitness and Families

In addition to good nutrition, growing children also need adequate rest and exercise. Rather than only using food as the activity to gather family members together, think of using exercise as a way to connect with friends and extended family. Sixty minutes a day of active physical activity or play is advised to keep childhood obesity and related diseases away.

Scheduling nightly family walks is great unless the weather is poor or extremely cold. Get creative with an indoor obstacle course, mini home gym or fitness-based video game. Mix it up! Families also may enjoy swimming, walking or tennis at a local fitness center. Once the exercise habit is in place, keep it in a regular routine!

Walk, walk, walk; rake, rake, rake; swim, swim, swim; shovel, shovel, shovel; ski, ski, ski; weed, weed, weed. Whatever the season is, you have countless no-cost opportunities to get physical exercise year-round.

Good health habits are taught as you model healthful eating and fitness practices and encourage children to make healthful choices themselves. Taking time to establish such habits now will be a valuable investment in your child's health and future.

Unsure of which moving activity to play next?

Try looking at this site: Aerobic, Muscle and Bone Strengthening exercises from the CDC:

www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/basics/children/what_counts.htm

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