

HEALTHY LIFESTYLES FOR KIDS: PARENTS AND CHILDREN FAQ's

PARENTS FAQ's

My children seem to prefer all bad foods. How can I get them to understand good nutrition?

Most nutritionists agree there are no good or bad foods. A better approach to healthy eating is to recognise everything is OK in moderation. For example, there is no reason why your child should not have fast food or candies occasionally. Rather than banning these foods encourage children to recognise them as foods which should be eaten occasionally, rather than daily. Reinforce this message by offering a combination of foods to your child planned over a weekly schedule, with the greatest emphasis on cereals and starchy foods, as well as fruit and vegetables. Involving your child in the planning of this, for example getting them to help with shopping, or preparation and cooking of foods allows them to experiment and creates an ideal opportunity for you as a parent to educate them about nutrition.

It is equally important that children view healthy eating as enjoyable and fun. Experimenting with your child

will instil a long-term interest in food and their own diet, and help them to recognise healthy options. The emphasis needs to be on simple factual information, showing your children that healthy diets are definitely fun and achievable.



There is so much information out there on Nutrition, I get confused, HELP!!! – who & what should I believe?

Unfortunately, there is a lot of misinformation around, and stories about food and diet can be sensationalised. It is not advisable to change your child's dietary intake on the strength of one article in a magazine or news report. If in doubt, or before making any radical changes to your diet, do seek advice from qualified professionals – nutritionists, doctors, and dieticians - who can provide very reliable guidance on healthy eating, based on many years of scientific research. Also do browse around this website where you will find additional information on healthy eating and lifestyles for the whole family. The bottom line is - if there are no good or bad foods, only good and bad diets, the key to success is to ensure variety with greatest emphasis on grains and other cereal products, fruit and vegetables and low-fat/lean sources of protein and calcium.



There is so much in the news about anorexia and other eating disorders, I am concerned that talking to my child about healthy eating and watching their weight might lead them to become obsessive about their weight.

Eating disorders have a strong psychological basis, and are usually an expression of low self-esteem or difficulties in coping with stress, rather than concerns about healthy nutrition or body weight. If you believe your child has or is at risk of developing an eating disorder taking an active interest will not make this worse, only show your child you care, and as long as the topic is approached with sensitivity, provides your child with an opportunity to talk with you about their worries and concerns. It is of paramount importance to work with your child on their emotional well being, and to involve a qualified and experienced practitioner such as doctor, or psychologist.



Remember also, that although severe or prolonged eating disorders are a very serious health concern, overweight and obesity in children is much more common problem and presents serious health risks also. So don't let all the media coverage on eating disorders put you off addressing concerns over weight gain.

I think my child is fat and that it's having a major impact on his daily life – what can I do?

You have already taken an important step by recognising there may be a problem and the need for action. Being overweight is detrimental to your child's health, and research has found that being overweight does have a negative effect on self-esteem and children's relationships with family and friends.



A good first step is to assess your child's weight and height. Growth charts, as well as instructions how to use them, can be found at <http://www.cdc.gov/growthcharts>. As a general rule, BMI (Body Mass Index) for age on the 90th centile or above indicates your child is probably overweight. The first target is to prevent any additional increase in overweight, whilst maintaining a nutritionally balanced diet.



Encouraging regular physical activity is important as this will help to prevent further weight gain.

Efforts to reduce overweight in children must be done very very slowly, to ensure that their diet remains nutritionally balanced and provides all the

nutrient required for normal growth and development. It's highly advisable to enlist the help of a specialist, such as your family doctor or a dietician. Your child will also benefit greatly from your support and encouragement with lots of positive feedback and involvement. For example, if you are trying to reduce the fat content of your child's diet, why not do this for the whole family, or make a regular date to do some sport or go for a walk together?

Some tips to boost your child's self-esteem include never telling your child that he is fat, avoid strict diets or withholding or depriving your child of food when he is hungry and don't overly nag your child about his/her weight or eating habits. Also, make sure your child knows that being overweight doesn't change what kind of person s/he is or how much you love him/her. This is paramount to losing the weight long term.

I plan family meals with balanced nutrition in mind. How can I influence what my child eats outside the home?

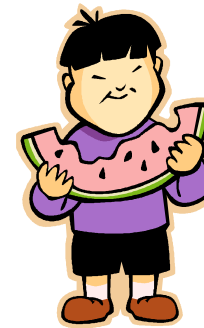


child a treat now and again. This can be talked about

and agreed upon. Involving your child in the decision making process will add ownership, and encourage them to apply the same standards to their food choices wherever they are.

My children just don't like and won't eat vegetables, what should I do?

Don't give up!! Fruit and vegetables are such an excellent source of nutrition, and are naturally low in fat that it's worth persevering. Keep trying new vegetables and also remember to go back occasionally to the ones your child refused previously as personal preferences and tastes change.



Remember to emphasise the fun element and never force your child to eat something they don't want/like. There is so much vegetable produce on the market shelves these days, and an array of ways to cook and present them that the possibilities for experimentation and adventure are endless. Dress them up in different ways, offer lots of choice, and why not try a theme meal (how about an all-orange packed lunch, or crazy-picture pizza)? Taking your child shopping and showing them all the different vegetables on offer, asking them about their favourite colours, shapes, textures, asking them to come up with ideas of how they can be cooked, and what they would eat them with, involves them in the decision making process and encourages a more adventurous interest in food.

Should I discourage snacking in my child's daily diet?

In reality, a no-snacks rule may be unrealistic — and even contrary to your children's needs. Children's stomachs are smaller, so they eat less at a sitting. Snacks provide a way for your children to recharge and sustain their energy until the next meal. Instead of eliminating snacks, plan them and guide your children toward healthy food choices. Make "snack appointments." Offer snacks at specific times, so your children know when to expect them. Serve snacks about 2 hours before the next meal and discourage snacking at other times.

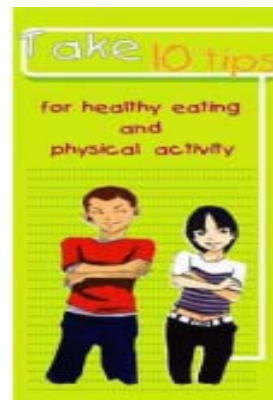


Encourage children to choose mainly low fat, low sugar snacks such as a slice of guava, a few carrot sticks, rice cracker with savoury or sweet topping, a bowl of wholegrain breakfast cereal and low-fat dairy or soy milk. No need to ban foods such as potato chips, candies or ice-cream, instead encourage your child to choose these less frequently.

My child is turning into a couch potato, she spends too much time in front of the TV and hates any exercise, please help!

Parents are the most important role model for children. It is therefore important that children see their parents living and enjoying an active lifestyle. This need not be organised sport – regular walks, using stairs instead of lifts and escalators, playing outdoors with your children are all valuable ways to build physical

activity into both your and their daily lifestyles. Also, to prevent boredom setting in, include a variety of activity options in time spent as a family. For example, invite your children's friends to come round a play a game of basketball, or join you for early evening walk, try a range of activities during weekend leisure time such as swimming, cycling, skating, and bowling. Do remember also, that if your children participate in organised sports, to take an interest and praise them for being involved, not just for their achievements.



P.S. AFIC's Take 10 Tips for healthy eating and physical activity leaflet has more ideas on healthy lifestyles, and can be viewed and downloaded by clicking on <http://www.afic.org/emp/Children%20Healthy%20Tips.pdf>



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