

# PARENTS: GET INVOLVED!

## Why Is Proper Nutrition Important?

The number of overweight and obese children in the United States is growing at a phenomenal rate. On the whole, kids are eating more unhealthy foods, while spending less time exercising and more time in front of the TV, computer, or video game console.

Since the 1960s, the number of overweight kids and adolescents in the United States has nearly doubled. Today, 10% of 2- to 5-year-olds and more than 15% of children between the ages of 6 and 19 are overweight. And a whopping 31% of adults are also obese. Studies indicate that overweight and obese adolescents have up to an 80% chance of becoming overweight and obese adults, especially if one or more parent has the same condition.

Overcoming overweight and obesity in your own children means adapting the way you and your family eat and exercise and the way you spend time together. Ensuring that your children lead a healthy lifestyle begins with you, the parent, and leading by example!

**It is well known that you, as parents, have a huge influence on the nutritional behaviors of your children. Your child is likely to adopt your eating habits, so if you eat healthy, your children will too!**

"It is easier to maintain your health than to regain it"

## Take Steps to Improve Nutrition and Encourage Healthy Eating

1. Have regular family meals.
2. Serve a variety of healthy foods and snacks.
3. Be a role model by eating healthy yourself.
4. Avoid battles over food.
5. Involve kids in the process of food preparation.

## Family Meals

Family meals are a comforting ritual for both parents and kids. Kids who take part in regular family meals are :

- more likely to eat fruits, vegetables, and grains
- less likely to snack on unhealthy foods
- less likely to smoke, use marijuana, or drink alcohol

In addition, family meals offer the chance to introduce your child to new foods and find out which foods your child likes and which ones he or she doesn't.

Consider these strategies:

- Allow your child to invite a friend to dinner.
- Involve your child in meal planning and preparation.
- Keep mealtime calm and congenial - no lectures or arguing.

Strive for nutritious food and a time when everyone can be there. This may mean eating dinner a little later to accommodate a child who's at sports practice. It can also mean setting aside time on the weekends, such as Sunday brunch, when it may be more convenient

## Encourage Healthy Eating Habits

- Buy and serve more fruits and vegetables (fresh, frozen, or canned). Let your child choose them at the store.
- Skip buying soft drinks and high fat/high calorie snack foods like chips, cookies, and candy. If children do not see these foods at home, they will be less likely to ask for them and you will not have to say “no.” Choose healthy snack foods.
- Eat breakfast every day. Skipping breakfast can leave your child hungry, tired, and looking for less healthy foods later in the day.
- Plan healthy meals and eat together as a family. Planning the week’s meals and grocery shopping can help save you time and money. Sitting together at meal times helps children learn to enjoy a variety of foods.
- Eat fast food less often. When you visit a fast food restaurant, take advantage of the healthful options offered.
- Do not get discouraged if your child will not eat a new food the first time it is served. Some kids will need to have a new food served to them 10 times or more before they will eat it.

**Healthy eating can do a lot for your child’s health and your own. Now is the best time to build the habit of proper nutrition!**

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- Try not to use food as a reward when encouraging kids to eat. Promising dessert to a child for eating vegetables, for example, sends the message that vegetables are less valuable than dessert. Kids learn to dislike foods they think are less valuable.
- Do not try to control the amount of food your child eats. It is up to you to provide your child with healthy meals and

### Healthy Snack Foods For Your Children To Try

- Fresh fruit
- Small amounts of dried fruits such as raisins, apple rings, or apricots
- Fresh vegetables such as baby carrots, cucumber, zucchini, or tomatoes cut and served with low-fat salad dressing for dipping
- Reduced fat cheese served with whole-wheat crackers
- Low-fat yogurt with fruit
- Small bagel spread with small amount of peanut butter
- Graham crackers, animal

#### Sources:

**Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**  
<http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/obesity/defining.htm#Adolescents>

**KidsHealth**  
[http://www.kidshealth.org/parent/nutrition\\_fit/index.html](http://www.kidshealth.org/parent/nutrition_fit/index.html)

**National Institute of Diabetes & Digestive & Kidney Diseases**  
<http://www.niddk.nih.gov/health/nutrit/pubs/helpchld.htm>