

# Parents make a difference in children's eating habits

By TERRY TEMPLEMAN, Ph.D.

Everyone knows that nutrition is important for children's health and well-being, but parents sometimes underestimate the impact of their own behavior on their children's eating habits. Here are a few helpful suggestions from the research on what works and what doesn't in getting your child to eat right.

## What works

**Model good eating habits.** Eat with your children and let them see what you eat and how much you eat. Eliminate distractions such as TV and phones during eating. Focus on the food.

**Maintain a positive attitude about food.** Mealtime is a good time to talk about food, what you like, how it tastes, where it comes

from, shopping for it, growing it, how you prepared it, where you got the recipe. Food is not only essential, it can be fun.

**Provide your child with a variety of nutritional foods.** Introduce your kids to the world of food by trying out nutritious foods with different tastes, textures, smells and looks. Take your kids shopping with you so they can see the variety of vegetables, fruits, meats, fish, grains and cereals that go into their meals.

**Restrict access to non-nutritional foods.** Keep the chips, sodas, candy, cookies and ice cream out of sight or out of the house.

## What doesn't work

**Diet foods.** Stay away from food substitutes such as powdered or liquid concoctions that have little

taste or texture. Avoid packaged foods and fast foods, which are high in salt and low in nutritional value.

**Punishing bad eating habits.** Don't punish or make fun of your children for not eating their vegetables or trying something new, but have them remain at the table. If there is a variety of food in front of them and they are hungry enough, they will try something eventually.



## Parenting Tip

It's not uncommon for children to be wary about trying new foods, especially foods with strong odors. Ignore their disdain and enjoy the food yourself. If they go to bed hungry, they will be more likely to try something healthy for breakfast.

**Stigmatizing picky eaters.** Avoid name-calling or making remarks about your child's food aversion or your child's weight. Anxious children are actually more prone to overeating!

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