



Foster healthy eating habits in children

If kids had their way, pizza, chicken fingers and French fries would make up a significant portion of their diets. But parents know they must make kids' culinary choices for them so youngsters get all of the vitamins and nutrients they need to grow up strong and healthy.

Parents also tend to know how difficult it can be to convince kids to embrace healthy eating. Healthy eating habits can help kids live healthier lives and perform better in the classroom while setting them up for a lifetime of making the right choices at mealtime. Though encouraging kids to eat healthy may not always be easy, the following are a few tips for parents hoping to foster healthy eating habits in their children.

- **Stick to a schedule.** Parents should establish a regular eating schedule, for both meals and snacks, so kids learn the importance of not skipping meals. Kids who learn to eat at regular intervals are more likely to continue doing so as they grow older. When kids stick to a meal schedule, they are less likely to overeat and they're likely to have more energy throughout the day, which should help them stay attentive at school and be more engaged in their extracurricular activities.

- **Involve kids when choosing the menu.** Kids might be more excited about eating healthy when you involve them in choosing the menu. Invite them along on trips to the grocery store and allow them to choose one of their favorite foods for the meal in exchange for eating the healthy fare you have chosen. Parents may end up eating a lot of side dishes of macaroni and cheese, but their youngsters will also end up eating their vegetables.

- **Plan healthy desserts.** Dessert is often considered an unhealthy indulgence, but there's plenty of nutritious desserts that are so delicious kids likely will not realize they're eating healthy. A dessert of fresh fruit and a small serving of yogurt can provide the same post-meal refreshment as ice cream or cake, but it does so with much fewer calories and a lot more nutrients and vitamins. What's more, kids will come to look at dessert as a chance to eat fresh fruits instead of an opportunity to load up on ice cream or other, less healthy alternatives.

- **Serve healthy portions.** Sometimes it's not just what is on the plate but how much is on the plate that can be healthy or unhealthy. When doling out portions for the family, cre-

ate healthy portions so kids are not encouraged to overeat. Kids who grow up eating healthy portions are more likely to continue doing so into adulthood. Overeating is one of the culprits behind being overweight and obese, so kids who learn to control their portions are much less likely to overeat and gain excess weight.

- **Don't reward kids with food.** Some parents try to reward youngsters with food, allowing kids to indulge in unhealthy fare in acknowledgment of a good report card or something else kids should be proud of. But using food as a reward is an unhealthy eating habit that can lead to problems down the road as kids become adults responsible for their own eating habits.

- **Set a positive example.** Kids are more likely to eat healthy when mom and dad are healthy eaters. If your first choice at snack time is to reach for a bag of potato chips, then don't be surprised when your kids opt for chips over healthier fare like a piece of fruit. "Do as I say, not as I do" is a tough sell to youngsters when it comes to their eating habits, so parents should set a positive example for their kids by ensuring their own diets are healthy.