



## Inspire Kids to Eat Well

Good nutrition helps kids grow well, learn and focus better at school, stay healthy, and fuel that natural energy most adults wish we still could muster on a regular basis. Good nutrition goes beyond specific nutrients however. When, where, and how your kids eat, as well as how much are equally important aspects of healthy eating.

Here are some guidelines for inspiring your kids to eat well in the holistic sense of this phrase:

### **Role model good, normal eating.**

Eat a balance of highly nutritious supportive foods and "fun foods" for enjoyment. If the adults in your home eat differently than the kids do (assuming textures are developmentally appropriate) this sends mixed messages about what to eat.

### **Aim for at least 4-5 family meals each week.**

Kids who eat more family meals eat better. In fact, the whole family tends to eat better. Remember that family meals can be breakfast, lunch or dinner – the key is *shared* meals.

### **Practice the Division of Responsibility in feeding:**

Parent/caregiver is responsible for the *what, where and when* of eating and the child is responsible for the *whether and how much*.

Research shows mixed results with things like "the polite bite" or "just two bites" to coax kids into eating healthy foods. If you have tried these strategies with mixed results it may be time to give the *Division of Responsibility* a try!

### **If your child is picky try to figure out why. Is it taste? Smells? Textures? Colors? Unfamiliarity? Food allergy/intolerance? Portion sizes (too big)? Negative association w/food? Attention?**

Children often require many exposures to foods before they will comfortably eat them (with the exception of sweet treats!). Other factors that can help:

- Offer new foods without emotion or fanfare
- Offer new foods at time of day when child is hungry and not over-tired or over-stimulated
- Make sure you or other adults/caregivers are eating the food too

## **Start with foods your child likes and expand on them.**

Some examples:

- Add banana or apple slices to PBJ
- Mix finely chopped veggies into red sauce for spaghetti, use whole wheat spaghetti noodle, add ground flax to meatballs
- Macaroni & cheese – mix veggies into this (broccoli, cauliflower, peas, carrots)

## **Get your kids in the kitchen and make it fun.**

The more involvement your kids have in the shopping, cooking/preparation of the foods the more likely she is to eat at least some of it.

## **Make eating environment pleasant.**

The dinner table isn't a time for arguments and stressful atmosphere will likely affect your kids. A calm, quiet, pleasant environment is best for all to digest. Limit eating in the car or out and about.

## **Allow kids to serve themselves from either the cooking area or family-style at the table.**

Make sure they know they can have more if they like so they can start with a small portion and eat what they need. This works best of the adults at the table practice this as well.

## **To increase vegetables in your kids' diets here are some ideas:**

- Grow veggies at home – herbs, grape tomatoes or salad in pots can be enough to get your kids excited about fresh veggies...and these veggies taste the best too
- If you can't grow your own food, bring your kids someplace where veggies grow (local farm, community garden, neighbor's garden, etc.)
- Offer a variety of cooked and raw veggies
- Serve veggies with salad dressings, sauces, ketchup, honey, maple syrup, or salsas that your kids like to add flavor – a drizzle may be enough to make the food more appealing to your kids
- Remember that many "extras" are actually veggies too – salsa, pickles, pickled veggies, etc.
- If your kids like sweet foods offer them yams, roasted beets, carrots and other naturally sweet veggies
- Try grilling, roasting, and baking or simply serving veggies with some fruits they like
- Add veggies to fruit smoothies (zucchini, cooked beets, carrots, yam, etc.)
- Look in vegetarian cookbooks and food magazines for new ideas for the whole family to increase veggies

## **Above all, stay calm.**

If your child is growing normally the best thing you can do to foster healthful eating as well as a healthy relationship with food, is to continue to be a good role model. Relax about food and enjoy it. Offer your family a variety of nutritious foods and balance "treat foods" that are less nutritious with healthier fare rather than forbidding foods.

## **More Resources:**

- *Child of Mine - Feeding with Love and Good Sense* by Ellyn Satter; ISBN 0-923521-51-8
- *Secrets of Feeding a Healthy Family* by Ellyn Satter; ISBN 0-9671189-0-5
- *Your Child's Weight - Helping Without Harming* by Ellyn Satter; ISBN 0-9671189-1-3
- *What to Eat* by Marion Nestle; ISBN 0-86547-704-3
- *Intuitive Eating* by Evelyn Tribole and Elyse Resch; 0-312-95721-1
- *Restaurant Confidential* by Michael Jacobsen and Jayne Hurley (from the Center for Science in the Public Interest); ISBN 0-7611-0035-0

