

Guide To Healthy Eating

To encourage young people to develop healthy attitudes about food and eating, parents and their children should become educated about the foods they eat and the behaviors centered around eating. Here are some tips to help your family develop healthy eating habits.

HEALTHY DIET

- 1. Plan healthy meals.** Your child should eat three well-balanced meals of average size each day, plus two nutritious snacks. Prepare foods that are baked, broiled or steamed, rather than fried. In addition to a small serving of lean meat, provide large servings of vegetables.
- 2. Shop smart.** Buy low calorie and low fat meals, snacks and desserts, as well as low fat or skim milk and diet soft drinks.
- 3. Read food labels.** Always refer to the nutrition label on prepared meals and snacks for the serving size. A serving of potato chips might be listed as having 200 calories, but the serving size may be only 10 chips. In addition, always check labels for information on fat and nutritional contents.
- 4. Stick to single servings.** Avoid serving seconds of the main course or dessert. If your child is still hungry, recommend eating more salad or vegetables.
- 5. Serve healthy desserts.** Fresh fruit instead of ice cream, cookies or cake makes for a healthier and lower calorie dessert option.
- 6. Limit fast food meals.** Although convenient for the busy parent, you should limit how often you allow your children to eat fast food, which is usually high in fat and calories.
- 7. Drink water.** Encourage your child to drink four to six glasses of water each day, especially before meals. Water has no calories and it will help them to feel full. Other healthy drink options include diet sodas and low fat milk. Limit or avoid regular soft drinks, as they contain 150-170 calories per serving.

HEALTHY HABITS

- 1. Make physical activity a priority.** Encourage your children to get some exercise every day, especially on weekends. Take family trips and outings that involve activities like hiking, swimming and bicycling. Use your backyard or a local park to play basketball, baseball, volleyball or badminton.
- 2. Limit television.** Watching television doesn't use up many calories, often encourages eating unhealthy foods and promotes unhealthy habits. Limit television viewing to about one or two hours each day, including playing video games or using the computer.
- 3. Eat at the table.** Start a family tradition of eating meals together in the kitchen or dining room whenever possible. Eating on the run or while watching television leads to unhealthy eating habits.
- 4. Maintain a health journal.** Help your child to keep a weekly journal of physical activity, food and beverage intake and the amount of time spent watching television or playing video games.

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- 5. Don't completely outlaw any foods.** Allow your child to have special foods or desserts on special occasions.
- 6. Avoid strict diets.** Fasting and fad diets rarely work and will discourage your child from continuing a healthy eating plan. Adult diet programs have not necessarily been proven safe or effective dieting tools for children.
- 7. Seek assistance.** Discuss your child's nutrition with your pediatrician or consider seeing a nutritionist for help in planning your family's diet.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The USDA has more information on family and child nutrition available at www.usda.gov.