

January 9, 2009

Release Date: January 14, 2009

Deborah Rhoades, M.A., R.D.

Extension Educator, Family & Consumer Sciences

FAMILY FIT RESOLUTIONS

The slate is clean. The New Year has begun, and millions of Americans are making promises to themselves to stop smoking, lose weight, make some new friends, get home earlier from work, or whatever. Webster's Dictionary defines resolution as a "decision as to future action."

Still hunting for resolutions? January is Family Fit Lifestyle month so consider setting a few "co-resolutions" with your child that will pay double dividends. As you coax your child toward a more healthful lifestyle, you will likely find yourself eating better and sporting healthier habits, too. Here's a list of suggestions:

1. Allow your child to make choices about what and how much to eat. To foster healthy attitudes toward food, children—even the very young, must learn to listen and respond to their body. Given a selection of healthful foods, kids have an amazing ability to self-regulate their diet.

Don't misunderstand. Giving kids choices doesn't mean a free-for-all with food! The parent still holds the job of planning which foods will be served and when. But once the food hits the table, the choice of what or even whether to eat rests with the child. A definitive source on this very subject is Ellyn Satter's "How to Get Your Kid to Eat...But Not Too Much" (Bull Publishing, 1987). It is available at most libraries and bookstores.

2. Help your child develop a positive body image. When she complains about being too fat, skinny, short, tall, or slow, emphasize the goodness about her body. Assure your child that people come in all different colors, shapes, and sizes. There is no one "best" way to look.

3. Introduce a wider variety of foods into your regular diet. Most families subsist on the same ten or so meals, in spite of thousands of foods to choose from. Is Monday night spaghetti night? Visit grocery stores and specialty produce markets with your child. Each week, choose a new, whole grain, a legume, a fruit, or a vegetable to try. Experiment with new food combinations, such as yogurt, cereal, and fruit mixtures, nonfat ricotta cheese spread on a blueberry pancake, or a baked potato topped with salsa and low-fat cheddar cheese.

Equal access programs/Equal opportunity employer.

4. Involve your child in the kitchen. Even though many kids are left to their own devices for some meals and snacks, they often lack basic cooking skills. It's true that cooking with your child may add to the time, mess, and confusion initially. But with practice, you will appreciate both the extra set of hands and your child's growing self-sufficiency.

5. Make family meals a priority. Breaking bread together promotes good nutrition habits. School-aged children who eat alone in front of the television tend to overeat, while younger children tend to eat fewer nutritious foods when isolated at meals.

Mealtime means more than refueling kids with nutrients—they also get a hefty dose of emotional, intellectual, and spiritual nourishment. As families pass the peas and pour the milk, they also convey values and establish traditions. Make it valuable **family time.**

6. Set a good example. Like it or not, parents are the ultimate nutrition teachers. What you buy, how you cook, the foods that you eat or refuse—all send strong messages about food to your child. The best way to teach your child about nutrition and health is to model good behavior—at times a tall order to fill!

7. Devise a snack plan with your child. Together, determine which foods are "anytime snacks," (e.g. fruits, vegetables, low fat, whole grain crackers) "sometimes snacks," (e.g. nuts, cheese, some cookies) and "occasional snacks." (e.g. soda/pop, chips, candy). Agree on a plan to make sure there is always a plentiful supply of "anytime snacks." Post the list on the refrigerator.

8. Emphasize the enjoyable aspects of food. Avoid labeling food as either medicine or poison. With older children especially, telling them "it's good for you" may be the kiss of death for a particular food. Likewise, kids are not immediately concerned that a food they like may clog their arteries or decay their teeth. Scare tactics rarely work.

9. Become involved with the meal program at your child's daycare or school. Since a child may receive up to half of his weekly food intake in a school or care setting, it's important for a parent to be aware of the nutritional quality of snacks and meals. Read and evaluate the menus and occasionally drop in to eat with your child.

Advocate for a program that offers a varied menu, well-prepared nutritious food, a pleasant mealtime atmosphere, and adequate time for children to eat.

10. Promote physical activity. Young bodies were made to move! Nutrition studies show that the increasing problem of childhood obesity stems more from inactivity than overeating.

In addition to team sports and structured activities, make daily activity a priority. Family walks, bike riding, basketball, skating, skiing, dancing and walking the dog can involve the entire family in exercise, togetherness and fun.

Make 2009 a happy and healthy new year! Tired of those same old meals or recipes. Your children will enjoy making, eating, and drinking the following recipes that's just a little different!

CHOCOLATY PEANUT BUTTER SMOOTHIE

1 cup fat-free or low-fat chocolate milk
2 tablespoons creamy peanut butter
4 pitted prunes
1/2 cup sliced ripe banana, frozen
2 ice cubes

Combine milk, peanut butter and prunes in electric blender. Process until smooth. Add frozen banana and ice and process until blended. Makes 2 servings.

FROZEN BANANA

1 banana
Orange or lemon juice
Aluminum foil

Peel banana and dip in orange or lemon juice. Wrap tightly with aluminum foil and freeze until ready to eat or use in recipe.

ALPHABET SOUP

1 teaspoon vegetable oil
1/2 cup chopped onion
1 clove garlic, chopped
2 cans reduced salt chicken broth
1 can crushed tomatoes
1/3 cup alphabet pasta
2 tablespoons parsley
1 cup frozen green beans
1 cup chopped carrots
1 cup diced potatoes
1 cup sliced celery
Salt and pepper to taste
2 tablespoons grated Parmesan cheese

Heat oil in electric skillet. Add onion and garlic and cook until onion is tender, about 2 minutes. Add broth, tomatoes, pasta and parsley to skillet and bring to a boil. Reduce heat and simmer for 10 minutes. Add green beans, carrots, potatoes, and celery to soup and cook for 10 minutes. Add salt and pepper to taste. With adult help, ladle soup into serving bowls and sprinkle with Parmesan cheese. Makes 6 servings.

TOOTY-FRUITY COOKIES

1 can (6 ounces) frozen orange juice concentrate
1/2 cup chopped dates
1/2 cup raisins
1/2 cup dried apricots
1 1/2 cups rolled oats
1 cup all purpose flour
1 teaspoon baking soda
1/4 teaspoon salt
1 egg
1/2 cup canola oil
1/4 cup sunflower or pumpkin seeds

Combine concentrate and fruit in saucepan and simmer for 10 minutes, stirring occasionally. Cool. Stir together oats, flour, baking soda, salt, egg and oil. Stir in fruit mixture and sunflower seed. Roll into small balls and place on a baking sheet lined with aluminum foil. Flatten balls into 1/4 inch cookies and bake at 350°F for 10 minutes. Makes 18 cookies. These cookies are high in fiber, vitamin A, and vitamin C.

Deborah Rhoades, MA, RD, LDN, is a licensed Registered Dietitian and Extension Educator in Family and Consumer Sciences. For more information about the Frederick County Extension Office check out our website <http://Frederick.umd.edu>

Equal access programs/Equal opportunity employers

DR:ls