News Release

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Aim for Healthy Family Meals, Snacks

Eating a variety of foods is recommended for health, but trying to overhaul family’s eating habits can be a challenge. You will be most successful if you aim for gradual changes, rather than making an issue of food.

Strive to plan and provide regular meals and snacks. Involve the whole family in healthy habits at snack and mealtime.

At snack and mealtime, limit low-nutrient foods, such as chips or cookies, since these foods have little nutrition and are high in calories, sugar, and fat. Replace them with a variety of fruits and vegetables as a part of snacks or meals each day. By keeping healthy foods on hand, it will be easier to offer your child healthy options. Shut down snacks one hour before mealtime, so as not to spoil appetites.

Short on mealtime ideas or snack suggestions? Check out www.eatsmart.umd.edu and click on cooking class. You will find information on choosing foods for nutrition and health, cooking, and meal management. You will also find ideas at www.choosemyplate.gov

Make mealtime a family time. Healthy habits at mealtime, such as setting aside a regular time each day to eat and preparing healthy meals, will help your children develop healthy habits as they grow. Eating regular meals can help to ensure everyone in your family is getting the nutrition they need. It will also keep you and your family from overeating. Eating meals together at home usually means a healthier meal for everyone and you get to enjoy spending time with your family.
Serve food family style to allow family members to choose a portion that matches their appetite. While it’s true that an 8-year-old may load up on mashed potatoes or some other favorite food, children typically model parents’ behaviors. If parents choose moderate-size servings of a variety of foods, kids will usually follow suit. Also, if children know food will be available, they may be less likely to overeat.

If your child is hesitant to try a new food, don’t force the issue. Wait a few weeks and serve it again, perhaps in a different form. For example, your child may shy away from drinking vegetable juice, yet like it in spaghetti sauce.

Offer milk or water, not soft drinks, at meals. Kids should drink low-fat milk or water instead of sweetened beverages or soda. Juice and soda can contribute to weight gain and tooth decay.

Dessert? Fruit, low-fat yogurt, or a cookie often can satisfy the desire for something sweet without adding too many extra calories.

Forget about the “Clean Plate Club.” Children typically eat when hungry and stop eating when they are full.

Be a role model for your kids and eat healthy. If you eat healthy, it sends a message to your kids about how to eat right.

Getting your kids to eat healthy foods may seem like a challenge. However, the food habits that your kids develop can make a big difference in their health and weight now and in the future.

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