

Teaching Our Children To Make Healthy Food Choices

It is so important in the busy lives that we all lead to eat healthy, nutritious meals. It's especially important for our children. Healthy foods help stabilize children's energy, balance their temperament and keep their minds alert. Parents should be role models for their children and set positive examples. It's not fair to eat potato chips, cookies, or sodas and expect a child to eat broccoli instead of French fries and an apple instead of ice cream.

Meal time should be a social event. Having dinner as a family every night is not only a great time to catch up and discuss everyone's day, it's also very comforting to a child and gives him or her a sense of security. Making a commitment to sit down and eat together as a family prevents on the fly, quickly gobbled non-nutritious meals. If eating together nightly is unrealistic, try setting a goal of 1-2 sit down family dinners per week. Eating nutritious meals together will start a lifelong healthy habit for your children.

Breakfast is the most important meal of the day. When children go to school on a full stomach, they are more focused and better equipped to learn. No one can drive a car if the gas tank is empty (unless it's electric). We humans are the same. We need nourishment in order for our bodies to do their jobs.

It's fun to plan a meal with your child. You can go to the store together, have your child pick out the vegetables and fruit, and then jointly prepare the meal. Children will be more inclined to eat healthy meals if they are involved in the preparation.

It's also nice to eat out at a restaurant, but generally restaurants use more fat, salt, and sugar in their cooking than the average home cooked meal. Be cautious in your choices. If your child wants French fries, then compromise and don't order dessert. Eating out as a family should be fun...everything in moderation.

Refrain from counting calories or commenting on your weight. Children listen to and absorb your words. Hearing their families discussing diets and losing weight can create negative associations to food, especially for girls. Young children and teens can be at risk for a number of eating disorders. It's important for parents to stay positive and discuss the reasons for eating healthy foods. However, no matter how parents promote good foods, it's difficult for a child to resist the temptation of junk food. Try not to have unhealthy foods in the house, but if you have to buy junk food, keep it to a minimum and limit the amount you allow your child to eat. The following are some healthy alternatives.

Instead of...

French fries - bake the fries in the oven. Spray with a little oil and lightly salt

Ice cream - low fat frozen yogurt or sorbet

Fried Chicken – baked chicken

Potato chips – pretzels, unbuttered popcorn

Doughnuts – bagels, English muffins

At Woodcrest School, we serve healthy balanced lunches. Fresh fruit, juice, and water are included in the students' meals.

Shosh Byron

Executive Director

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