12 Nutrition Hints & Tips for Your Children

CHILD CARE
of Southwest Florida, Inc.

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12 Nutrition Hints & Tips for Your Children

1: Start with the Shopping Cart

Most parents are concerned about keeping their children healthy. One of the easiest ways to do this is to start with a healthy foundation. Be conscientious of what goes into your shopping cart, and cook meals at home so you know what ingredients your children are eating. Sounds easy enough…but, we know better. Today's parents are busy. Between shuttling children from school, to soccer, ballet, and birthday parties, you may not have the time to spend hours in the grocery store reading labels and searching for the healthiest ingredients. You may also not have the time to slave away in the kitchen, making organic, veggie lasagna with only the freshest ingredients. Even if you did have the time, how do you get your children to eat it?

Here are a few tips for helping even the busiest moms and dads make good decisions about what goes into the shopping cart.

Shop the grocery store "perimeters" – In most grocery stores, the perimeter of the store is where the fresh fruit and vegetables, dairy, and meat are kept. Reach for the foods that don't come with a long nutrition label. Even better, reach for foods that don't even need a nutrition label. If you buy foods such as fresh fruit and vegetables, nuts, fresh fish, or lean meat, you don't even have to worry about scanning through the list of ingredients. To make shopping easy, try to avoid too much food in the inner isles, which typically hold more pre-packaged foods. Avoid items that contain a lot of preservatives, as well as the "3 S's" that you want to keep to a minimum: Sugar, Saturated fat, and Sodium.

As you are shopping, you should also keep in mind certain nutrients that are important for child nutrition and may be deficient in the daily diets of some American children.

Fiber – Fiber promotes digestive health, reduces the risk of heart disease, and helps to keep blood sugar levels normal. Fiber may also help children maintain a healthy weight because it fills them up on fewer calories. Fiber is found in plant foods, such as:

- Vegetables (fresh, frozen, and canned)
- Fruits (fresh, frozen, and canned)
- Beans (dried, canned)
- Edamame (fresh or frozen)
- Nuts and seeds
- Whole grain cereal (hot and cold)
- 100% whole wheat or whole grain bread products
- Whole grain blend pastas
- Whole grain crackers
- Whole wheat tortillas

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Potassium
Potassium is crucial for good health and development in children. Potassium works as an electrolyte, and maintains a healthy balance of water in the blood and body tissues. It also assists in nervous system and muscle function. Recommended amounts of potassium are 3,000 milligrams (mg) per day for children ages 1 to 3 years and 3,800 mg per day for children ages 4 to 8 years. Your child doesn't have to get the recommended daily amount of potassium every day. However, you should aim for the daily amount as an average over the course of a few days or a week. Good sources of potassium include:

- Artichokes
- Avocados
- Bananas
- Cantaloupe
- Leafy green vegetables
- Orange juice
- Prunes and prune juice
- Papayas
- Potatoes with skin
- Tomatoes
- Beans and peas
- Fish, shellfish, and clams
- Nuts
- Low-fat and fat-free dairy (Reference www.choosemyplate.gov for information about dairy for your child, and introducing low-fat or fat-free milk to your pre-schooler.)

Healthy Protein and Amino Acids
Try to include a healthy protein in almost every meal your children eat. Protein's amino acids are the building blocks for our body's cells, according to a report by the Institute of Medicine. Good sources of lean protein are:

- Eggs
- Reduced-fat cheese
- Fish
- Lean meats
- Skinless poultry
- Low-fat milk
- Soybeans and soybean products
- Yogurt

Learn more about CCSWFL's USDA Child Care Food Programs.

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2: Dealing with Picky Eaters

So, you took the time to shop for all of the right foods, carefully prepared a wonderful, healthy meal, and placed it in front of your little angel with a huge smile. Your child takes one look and shoves the plate away. Your spirits sink, and you are forced to transform from Betty Crocker into either a Drill Sergeant (You WILL eat this and like it!) or a used car salesman negotiator (Take at least 3 more bites if you want dessert!) This scenario may be all too familiar to those with young children, or even older children who still have picky eating habits. Although meal times may seem like a constant power struggle, they don't have to be!

Here are a few tips from the Mayo Clinic's website that will help you "fight the good fight" in your efforts to provide a balanced diet for your picky eater.

No. 1: Respect your child's appetite — or lack of one
If your child isn't hungry, don't force a meal or snack. Likewise, don't bribe or force your child to eat certain foods or clean his or her plate. This might only ignite — or reinforce — a power struggle over food. In addition, your child might come to associate mealtime with anxiety and frustration. Serve small portions to avoid overwhelming your child and give him or her the opportunity to independently ask for more.

No. 2: Stick to the routine
Serve meals and snacks at about the same times every day. Provide juice or milk with the food, and offer water between meals and snacks. Allowing your child to fill up on juice or milk throughout the day might decrease his or her appetite for meals.

No. 3: Be patient with new foods
Young children often touch or smell new foods, and may even put tiny bits in their mouths and then take them back out again. Your child might need repeated exposure to a new food before he or she takes the first bite. Encourage your child by talking about a food's color, shape, aroma and texture — not whether it tastes good. Serve new foods along with your child's favorite foods.

No. 4: Recruit your child's help
At the grocery store, ask your child to help you select fruits, vegetables and other healthy foods. Don't buy anything that you don't want your child to eat. At home, encourage your child to help you rinse veggies, stir batter or set the table.

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3: Make Healthy Food Fun

Sometimes children are more likely to eat something if it looks like “fun”…even if it’s good for them! Think about it. Which looks more fun and appealing to a child, a fun shaped, frosted cookie with brightly colored sprinkles? Or, a stalk of broccoli? Most children would immediately reach for a cookie, but turn their nose at a vegetable. But, what if that broccoli stalk was actually a tree in a “forest of fun”? Perhaps it could be surrounded by a sun made from an orange slice, a pretzel-stick-man, and some goldfish crackers “swimming” nearby. All of a sudden, it becomes more appealing if your child gets to be a “giant”, and is eating a “tree”!

Children also love to eat fun shapes. Invest in fun shaped cookie cutters, but don’t just use them for cookies! Try cutting sandwiches, fruit, or other healthy foods that can be ‘molded’ into something that disguises them into a fun treat! Or, try using fruit to make a funny face on a healthy pancake.

Another popular snack is ‘Ants on a Log’. All you need is celery, peanut butter and raisins. Let your child rinse the celery and you cut the ends. Next let your child spread peanut butter on the celery with a spoon. Lastly you and your child make your ‘Ants’, raisins march onto the log. You both will have a lot of fun and your child will want to ‘play Ants on a log’ with you all the time.“Raisin ants” trailing up to the “logs” of celery.

There are many websites that offer creative ideas for turning healthy snack food or meals into “fun” for your child. One of our favorites is…the *master* of appealing to children… none other than Disney! Go to Familyfun.go.com/recipes/cooking-with-kids for some excellent fun AND healthy snack ideas and recipes.

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4: Develop Good Habits

Many habits can take only days to form, but may take weeks or months to break (or more, depending on the habit). This stands true for good habits, as well as bad habits. If you instill good eating and activity habits in your children from the start, it will make proper nutrition much, much easier to sustain. Here are some tips that can help your child develop good eating habits early on:

Be a good role model – If your children see you trying to eat right and staying physically active, they'll take notice of your efforts. Although they may not want to follow suit right away, you'll be sending a consistent message that good health is important to your family. You don't have to be perfect all the time, but as long as you're making efforts and reminding children of the benefits of healthy eating, it will sink into their subconscious and make an impact.

Stay positive – Instead of focusing on foods your child is not allowed to eat, tell them what they can have instead. Try to keep things fun and positive. Celebrate successes and this will help children and develop a good self-image.

Make dinner a time to bond with family – Get your kids involved in cooking and planning meals, and make it a point for the family to sit down at the table together for dinner. This helps everyone develop good eating habits together, and you will get the bonus of quality time with your children.

Read food labels together – The whole family will learn what's good for their health and be more conscious of what they eat. This type of habit helps change behavior for a lifetime.

Set realistic goals – The key to establishing any new behaviors or healthy habits is to set realistic goals and limits. Begin with small steps and gradual changes, which will build up over time and can make a big difference in your health. For example, instead of eliminating sugary breakfast cereals altogether, find cereals with less sugar. Or, decrease your child's overall sugar intake for the day by showing them the grams of sugar and letting them choose one item per day so they don't go over that.

Stay involved – Insist on good food choices at school and make sure your children's healthcare providers are monitoring indicators like BMI, blood pressure and cholesterol. Make your voice heard on issues that are affecting your child's health.

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5: Take Away Temptation

"Lead me not into temptation; I can find the way myself." - Rita May Brown.

If your child sees a jar of cookies sitting on the counter, it will be much harder to convince him to have carrots instead for a snack. However, when all of the options in the house are fairly healthy, then your child will have several snacks to choose from, without the temptation of unhealthy foods. By simply not having the calorie-rich, high-fat, or high-sugar snacks available, it will make things much easier for you and your child.

Although everything can be enjoyed in moderation, try to stock your kitchen with healthier options, and make sure these are the snacks that are visible and in reach of your child. If you want to have a few of the "indulgent" snacks available for special occasions, keep them in a high cabinet, out of reach or view of your child. Only allow your children to eat them sometimes, so that they truly will be treats!

For the majority of the time, have healthier snack options available, such as these easy-to-prepare, low-fat and low-sugar treats:

Fresh Fruit such as apples, bananas, oranges, grapes, strawberries, blueberries, and sliced kiwi.

Fresh Vegetables such as carrots, broccoli, bell peppers, celery, etc. Use low-fat dressings or hummus for veggie dips, or try peanut butter or cream cheese for celery spreads.

Fortunately, you can be assured that your child will receive healthy food at all six of CCSWFL's child care centers. Check out the menu.

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6: Make Favorite Foods Healthier

An easy way to begin a healthier lifestyle for you and your children is to do a little "tweaking" to the recipes that you prepare regularly and that your family enjoys. With just a few changes, these dishes can be healthier and just as satisfying. Here are a few suggestions:

- For dishes that incorporate cheese, replace with fat-free or low-fat cheese
- For pasta dishes, replace regular pasta with fiber-rich whole grain pasta (some brands even offer a lighter colored whole grain pasta, so your kids won't even see the difference!)
- Try using margarine or low-calorie, low-fat butter instead of regular butter in recipes. Use spray butter at the table instead of putting a stick of butter out.
- Cook with Olive Oil instead of Canola or other types of oil high in saturated fat.
- Buy leaner meats. Instead of ground beef, consider ground turkey, or read the labels and buy the lean or extra-lean ground beef.
- Instead of eggs, consider egg-beaters or use only the egg whites to cut down on fat and cholesterol.
- Replace fried foods with baked foods (baked chicken nuggets are often just as tasty to your kids, and have only a fraction of the saturated fat!)
- Try to incorporate vegetables into your meals whenever possible. For example, if lasagna is a family favorite, try adding a little spinach to it. (If your kids turn their nose up at the site of green in their lasagna, try this "Sneaky Chef" recipe for stovetop lasagna which incorporates a green puree that is completely undetectable to the naked eye…or taste bud!)
- Instead of french fries, try making sweet potato fries.

For new ideas about how to add more fruits and vegetables to your daily diet, there is a great recipe database from the FruitsandVeggiesMatter.gov. Simply check the fruits and vegetables you want to incorporate, and this website will provide you with a number of tasty recipes!

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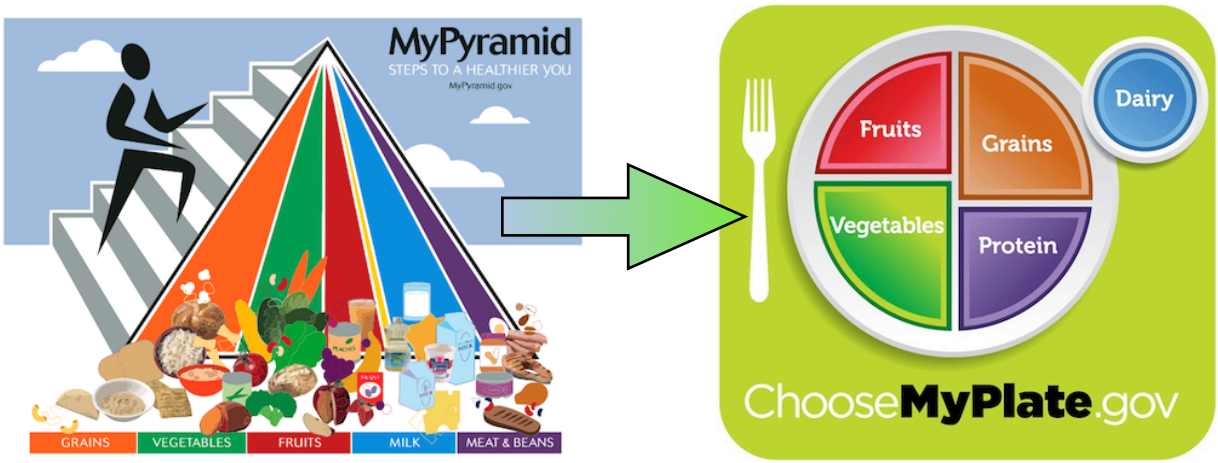
7: From Food Pyramid to MyPlate



Until recently, the model for healthy eating in the United States was a guide called “The Food Pyramid”.

However, in 2011, the USDA (the agency in charge of nutrition in the United States) switched to a new symbol called **MyPlate**. This is a colorful plate with some of the same messages as the Food Pyramid such as *eat a variety of foods* and *eat less of some foods and more of others*.

However, the pyramid had six vertical stripes to represent the five food groups plus oils. Whereas, MyPlate features just four sections: vegetables, fruits, grains, and protein. It also features a side order of dairy in blue.

Just like the pyramid, where stripes were different widths, the plate has been divided into different segments to illustrate how to balance each food group.

The primary message of MyPlate is that fruits and vegetables take up half the plate, with the vegetable portion being a slightly larger than the fruit section. Also, the grain section is bigger than the protein section. This is because nutrition experts recommend you eat more vegetables than fruit and more grains than protein foods.

The divided plate also aims to discourage extremely large portions, which can cause weight gain.

MyPlate was introduced by First Lady, Michelle Obama, who started the “Let’s Move” campaign to help kids get healthier. Mrs. Obama claimed that the pyramid wasn’t easy enough for parents and kids to follow. The plate is simple and useful, and abides by the most recent studies regarding proper nutrition.

Learn more about the Child Care Food Program (CCFP).

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8: Prevent Childhood Obesity

Numerous studies have shown that the rate of childhood obesity continues to rise in the United States. Doctors are particularly troubled by this problem because it can lead to very serious health risks, such as:

- Heart disease, caused by high cholesterol and/or high blood pressure
- Type 2 diabetes
- Asthma
- Sleep apnea

In addition, obesity in children can cause psychological damage due to social discrimination especially amongst peers.

These health risks are not necessarily only something that your child will only be at risk for in the future. Obese children and adolescents may experience immediate health consequences. They have been found to have risk factors for cardiovascular disease (CVD), including high cholesterol levels, high blood pressure, and abnormal glucose tolerance. In a population-based sample of 5 to 17 year-olds, almost 60% of overweight children had at least one CVD risk factor while 25 percent of overweight children had two or more CVD risk factors. (Dietz W. Health consequences of obesity in youth: Childhood predictors of adult disease. Pediatrics 1998;101:518–525).

So, this, along with future health risks and other psychological risks, it is absolutely imperative for parents to ensure that children do not reach this level of obesity.

To help your child maintain a healthy weight, make sure that you follow the MyPlate guidelines, and ensure healthy eating options are provided at home and school. You should also balance the calories your child consumes from foods and drinks with adequate physical activity. Encourage outdoor activities or indoor games that keep your child active.

If your child is currently overweight, remember that the goal for children and teens is to reduce the rate of weight gain, but still allow for normal growth and development. Children and teens should NOT be placed on a weight reduction diet without the consult and supervision of your health care provider.

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9: Healthy Eating in School

Maybe you're taking all the precautions to ensure that your child has a balanced, nutritious diet. You make sure they are active, and that high-sugar or fattening snacks are kept to a minimum. But, as soon as you send them off on the school bus, it's out of your hands. So, how can you ensure that these healthy eating habits are maintained while your child is at school? Although some public school systems are beginning to offer healthier lunch choices and restrictions on vending machines, this is not always the case. Or, sometimes your child may simply not opt for the healthy choice.

Here are a few suggestions to help your child maintain healthy eating habits, even when they are in the lunchroom.

Review the Menu Together: Read the school menu with your child and look for the healthiest choices. Remind them why its important to make healthy choices, and the positive effects it will have on their body, then encourage them to choose those items for lunch.

Pack a Healthy Lunch: Fill your child's lunchbox with healthy, tasty foods—like whole grain bread, fresh fruits and veggies, lean meats, low-fat or skim milk and 100% juice.

Be Proactive: Talk to other parents who are concerned about their child's nutrition, and come up with some ideas for making healthier foods available at school. For example, you may want to get a group of parents together and design the perfect garden for students. Then set a budget, get approval for a spot, raise a few dollars, and start digging!

Do Your Homework: Find out whether your kids are able to get healthy foods in the cafeteria or vending machines, or if the school is selling healthy foods at fundraisers.

Show Appreciation: Talk to the teachers and school staff about how you value their efforts to provide healthy foods and beverages at school.

CCSWFL hopes you're able to implement the knowledge you're learning in this eBook with your children. For more tips on how to improve your relationship with your child, visit HappyHealthyChildhoods.com.

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10: Help Your Child Stay Active

According to the Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2010, Children and teens should participate in at least 60 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity most days of the week, preferably daily. Unfortunately, for many children, biking to the playground and playing kickball in the backyard have been replaced by watching television, playing video games, or surfing online. These types of sedentary activities, combined with the sedentary time required from sitting in a classroom, reading, and doing homework, makes for a very inactive child.

Although quiet time for reading and homework is fine, you should try to limit the time your children are watching TV, or playing video games or on the computer to a maximum of 2 hours per day. Then, encourage them to do something active!

Set a good example – If children see you hanging out on the couch most of the time, they are likely to mimic this behavior. If you are excited about doing a physical activity yourself, encourage your family to join you. Your children are most likely to want to participate. Make sure you approach it as something fun to do, instead of something you "have" to do. Here are a few examples of moderate intensity physical activities to suggest to your children:

- Brisk walking
- Playing tag
- Jumping rope
- Playing soccer
- Swimming
- Dancing
- Jumping on a trampoline or bounce house

Some other activities could include things like riding a bike or scooter, helping you wash the car, playing on a "Slip-N-Slide", playing catch or frisbee. Children love games and competitions, so if you can find a way to make a contest out of something, or turn it into a fun game, it is easy to get your child excited about getting off the couch!

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11: Indoor Activities for Kids

On a rainy day, it's difficult to avoid the rut of television or video games as the primary activity for your child. However, it's still important to find ways to get in at least an hour of activity, even if you're stuck indoors. It may be hard to get your child to do a work-out video with you, so you have to be a little more creative. Here are some ideas for indoor activities for kids that will keep them active, but don't involve running through the house!

Build a Blanket Fort – Although this isn't a high-level cardio activity, it still requires you to keep moving. Grab some flat sheets, blankets, and stable objects for "support beams", and get to work! For younger children, this one requires supervision and help from an adult, so it may help you stay active as well! Here's a great step-by-step instruction of how to build an awesome blanket fort.

Get Your Groove On – This one is also fun for the whole family. Just make sure you have your video camera handy! Put on some upbeat tunes and take turns with your kids breaking out your favorite dance moves. You can have a dance-off and judge who has the best moves in various categories (creativity, fast dancing, silly dancing, technical moves, etc.)

Twister – This isn't a cardiovascular activity, but it does promote muscle strength and balance (it's basically like a yoga/pilates combo for kids!) The adults can be the spinners…or, if you're feeling especially flexible, take your chances and join in!

Play "active" video games – Some of today's video games actually require kids to be active and off the couch. Games such as "Dance Dance Revolution", Wii Fitness, or Kinex, can keep you active and raise your heart rate.

Rearrange the Bedroom – If they are old enough to move small pieces of furniture, have your children help reorganize their room and rearrange the furniture. Make it a fun activity by letting them choose how they would like to set up their room and redecorate, giving them a sense of individuality and independence (meanwhile keeping them physically active).

Visit an indoor Playground – Most areas have some sort of indoor playgrounds, either at Family Fun Centers, or in a mall. Take a little trip and let your children enjoy hours of fun on indoor playgrounds or bounce houses.

Go to an indoor skating rink – Roller skating or ice skating rinks are great indoor activities that will keep your kids active, regardless of the weather!

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12: Do's and Don'ts of Children's Nutrition

A recent Reader's Digest article entitled, "Foods that Harm, Foods that Heal" listed some excellent "Do's and Don'ts" to follow in regard to your child's nutrition. Some of these have been mentioned in our eBook, but this is a quick, simple reminder of what you should and shouldn't do in order to keep your children eating healthy!

1. Do set a good example for your child to copy. Share mealtimes and eat the same healthy foods.
2. Do discourage snacking on sweets and fatty foods. Keep plenty of healthy foods, such as fruits, raw vegetables, low-fat crackers, and yogurt, around for children to eat between meals.
3. Do allow children to follow their natural appetites when deciding how much to eat.
4. Do encourage children to enjoy fruits and vegetables by giving them a variety from an early age.
5. Do ask children to help prepare meals. If parents rely mostly on convenience foods, children may not learn to enjoy cooking.
6. Don't add unnecessary sugar to drinks and foods.
7. Don't accustom children to extra salt by adding it to food or placing the shaker on the table.
8. Don't give whole nuts to children under the age of 5, who may choke on them. Peanut butter and chopped nuts are fine as long as the child is not allergic to them.
9. Don't force children to eat more than they want.
10. Don't use food as a bribe.
11. Don't make children feel guilty about eating any type of food.

To enrich the lives of other children in Southwest Florida, you can volunteer your time, make donations, or participate in a fundraiser at www.CCSWFL.org.

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