

helping kids eat healthfully

Childhood is the time when kids establish eating patterns that can last a lifetime. Teach your children how to make informed nutritious food choices with these suggestions from Jennie McCary, MS, RD, LD, community nutritionist for the Albuquerque Public Schools and chair of the New Mexico Action for Healthy Kids.

[1] Kids Need 5 A Day

Help children get at least five servings of fruits and vegetables each day with these strategies.

- Keep fruits and veggies readily available where kids can see them (e.g., on the counter or table) and leave washed, cut, ready-to-eat produce on the top shelf in the fridge.
- Involve kids in meal planning and preparation. Let younger children wash spinach, tear up lettuce or peel carrots. Teach older kids how to use a knife safely by cutting veggies to toss into a stir-fry.
- Make fruit beverages. Fruit smoothies are popular with kids and when made with yogurt or milk can also be a great way to add more calcium.
- Freeze fruits. Frozen grapes and melon are a fun, refreshing treat for kids, especially on hot summer days.

- Play hide-and-seek with fruits and veggies. Blend cooked cauliflower or sweet potatoes into traditional mashed potatoes, or shred carrots and zucchini into spaghetti sauce.
- Start a small garden. Most kids will eat vegetables they helped grow.

[2] The Importance of Breakfast

A basic breakfast should be a balance of carbohydrate, protein and fat

from two to three food groups: for example, try serving a whole grain, low-fat milk and fruit. But don't get overwhelmed by the task of making a traditional breakfast. Leftovers or grab-and-go items, such as squeezable yogurt and a granola bar, work as well as more conventional fare. Foods that can be eaten on the go include a mini bagel with cream cheese; a peanut butter and jelly sandwich; or a piece of fruit and a bag of dry, unsweetened cereal.

Get kids to buy into breakfast by involving them in the planning and preparation. For young kids, this can be as simple as having them set the table or pour the cereal or milk. Empower your children by letting them decide what to eat, but give them a choice between two nutritious foods.

[3] Feeding Overweight Kids

If your child is overweight, what can you do? Diets are not recommended for growing kids and teens. Instead of weight loss, emphasize positive eating and physical activity changes. Try these suggestions:

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- Eat dinner together as a family so you can monitor what your kids are eating daily.
- Sit down at the table, where you can teach kids how to eat more slowly, pay attention to their hunger and avoid the mindless eating that may occur when watching television.
- Involve kids in planning menus, shopping for food and preparing meals.
- Make high-fiber fruits and vegetables a part of every meal.
- Focus on offering lower-calorie, nutrient-rich meals and snacks without severely restricting food intake.
- Buy healthier foods and keep them easily accessible in the fridge and cupboards and on the counter. Keep sweets, chips and soda out of sight or out of the house.
- Limit sweetened beverages, including soda and fruit drinks, to an occasional treat.
- Reduce television watching and computer/video time to less than 2 hours a day.
- Promote physical activity as a family by taking walks, playing outdoor games and riding bikes together. ■

quick & healthy after-school snacks

Nutritious snacking is an important part of every kid's diet. Here are some winning combos to try:

- peanut butter and jelly sandwich topped with sliced bananas or apples
- carrot and cucumber sticks drizzled with low-fat dressing
- apple slices dipped in peanut butter
- grapes and pear slices with cheese cubes
- fruit skewers dipped in yogurt
- whole-grain crackers with low-fat cheese slices
- pita bread with hummus
- air-popped popcorn
- yogurt with granola and banana slices
- homemade trail mix (raisins, peanuts, whole-grain cereal)
- bean burrito



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