



Helping Kids Make Smart Food Choices

The age-old problem of getting kids to eat their veggies might be tougher than ever. Today's parents have to compete with fast food, vending machine snacks, sodas, and other options that are quick and easy—and often far from healthy. But you can help your children develop better eating habits.

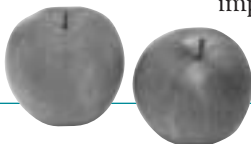
Learning about groceries

You might be surprised to learn that children will usually pick nutritious foods when given the choice. But it's up to parents to give them those choices, and spicing up your trips to the grocery store is a great place to start. "Getting kids involved in the grocery shopping teaches them how to pick out produce and other ingredients," said Kristen Bardon, R.D., L.D., senior clinical dietitian in the Department of Clinical Nutrition at The University of Texas M. D. Anderson Cancer Center. "It also helps them learn how to prepare healthy meals."

Have your kids help put together the shopping list, and be sure to suggest lots of fresh fruits and vegetables. That way you can talk about healthy choices before ever getting to the store. Children will be more interested in food that's good for them when they have a chance to make some of the decisions. And you'll learn more about what they like and don't like.

Once at the store, take the children on a scavenger hunt for healthy foods, Ms. Bardon suggests. This will make shopping exciting and helps them look beyond the junk food aisles. Try these tips for a successful scavenger hunt:

- Show your kids a picture of a fruit or vegetable and ask them to find it.
- Have them describe



Healthy Diet Recommendations

You can find a world of information about food recommendations for children on the Internet. Here are a couple of sources to help you get started.

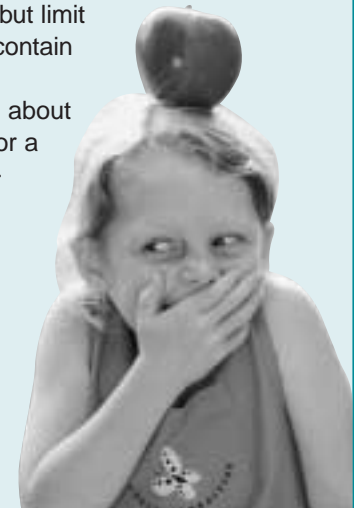
www.americanheart.org

The American Heart Association offers an eating pattern for families at its Web site. Highlights include:

- ✓ Eat foods that are low in saturated fat, trans fat, cholesterol, sodium, and added sugars.
- ✓ Serve whole-grain and/or high-fiber breads and cereals. Look for "whole grain" as the first ingredient on the food label.
- ✓ Serve a variety of fruits and vegetables each day, but limit the amount of juice kids drink. Each meal should contain at least one fruit or vegetable.
- ✓ Don't overfeed your kids. Typical calorie needs are about 900 per day for a 1-year-old child, 1,800 per day for a 14- to 18-year-old girl, and 2,200 per day for a 14- to 18-year-old boy (or more for active teens).

www.fruitsandveggiesmatter.gov

For recipes and eating tips, visit the Web site "Fruits and Veggies—More Matters." The site includes a calculator that you can use to figure out specific food serving information for your child. The "More Matters" program is sponsored by the U.S. government and private partners.



the shape, color, and size of fruits and vegetables they see.

- Have them count fruits and vegetables.
- Encourage them to find fruits and vegetables that they haven't eaten before.

Benefits of a healthy diet

By being a good role model for healthy eating, you also can set children on a lifelong path of making the right food choices.

"It's important for kids to start eating healthy early in life," Ms. Bardon said. "Healthy eating can help prevent many problems as they get older, including obesity, diabetes, heart disease, and some cancers."

Not only can eating well help prevent problems down the road, it's important for growing kids to take in the nutrients provided by fruits, vegetables, and other healthy



foods. But these nutrients are even more important for children who have cancer or another major illness.

"These children need a healthy, well-balanced diet sufficient in protein and calories," Ms. Bardon said. "Protein helps the body heal, and calories produce energy and help kids keep up their weight." ●



For more information, talk to your physician, or:

- call askMDAnderson at 1-877-632-6789
- visit the Department of Clinical Nutrition's Web site at www.mdanderson.org/departments/nutrition
- visit www.mdanderson.org

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