

PROMOTING HEALTHY FOOD & EATING



Bright Futures for FAMILIES



Nutrition – healthy food and eating – is a main part of children’s lifelong health and well-being. Your family’s culture and access to healthy foods helps will shape your children’s eating habits. Promoting healthy food and eating helps teach children about eating for growth. They also learn when and what to eat to keep healthy. And, they learn the skills needed to develop the social relationships that are part of preparing food and sharing meals with others.

Promoting healthy nutrition is about more than just the food we eat:

- **Nutrition for growth** - The food your child eats is fuel for growth. Growth is a major priority for infants through the teen years. Growth is not just about getting bigger. Good nutrition leads to healthy growth patterns and helps children and adults stay a healthy weight throughout life.
- **Learning eating skills** - Young children must learn to feed themselves. These skills take practice. Older kids learn to refine their eating skills and table manners.
- **Healthy eating habits** - Learning when, what and how much to eat to get the vitamins, minerals, carbohydrates, proteins, fats, and other nutrients a growing body needs is another important life skill. This is key for older children and teens so they can make healthy food choices when they eat away from home.
- **Healthy eating relationships** – Make mealtimes pleasant. Praise your child for what he did well during the meal. This helps create healthy eating habits. Praise also helps promote a child’s healthy social and emotional development.



Child and Family

A well-fed child is likely to be happier and better able to learn new skills. Mealtime is a perfect time to learn about and share good food. This is also a time for children to learn about their culture and traditional foods. Eating is a social and nutritional activity.

Good nutrition can lead to good brain growth and healthy physical development. The whole family can learn to eat healthy. If your family is unable to afford good food or your area does not have good sources of healthy food, talk with your health provider and others to learn about community resources that can help.

Ages and Stages

- **Infancy** - Your baby depends on you to make good feeding choices. One of the best choices for lifelong health is to breastfeed. Breast milk provides the best nutrition. It also protects babies from illness. And, breastfeeding helps mothers lose pregnancy weight, and may offer some protection against breast and ovarian cancer. Mothers who cannot breastfeed, or choose not to, will want to talk with their health care providers about formula choices.
- **Early Childhood** - Toddlers and preschoolers grow fast and have lots of energy. They need good food to grow and stay healthy. Often, young children refuse to eat healthy food! Parents want their children to make choices. But, it can be hard to find and offer healthy food choices – at mealtimes and for snacks – they will eat.
- **Middle Childhood** - Children start to eat more meals and snacks outside of home. Your child may want to eat what his friends are eating. Parents



cannot always control the food choices they will be offered, and oversee the choices they make. Families can work with schools to improve school lunches. They can also work together to make all foods healthier, such as the choices available in vending machines. Ask if there are lesson plans about healthy nutrition.

- **Adolescence** – Teenagers are making their own decisions about what to eat. Peer pressure may sway their food choices. Teens may also experiment with vegetarian meals, ethnic foods, or food fads. And, some are not always happy with

their bodies. Watch for unusual changes in eating habits, as this may be a sign of an eating disorder. Teens will still need parents to help them learn about new foods, and make healthy choices. When teens play sports or have a routine for physical activity, they may be encouraged to eat healthy food to help them stay fit.

- **Special health needs** – Children and youth with special health needs may have unique nutrition needs. Children may need additional help to learn to eat without help and make healthy food choices.

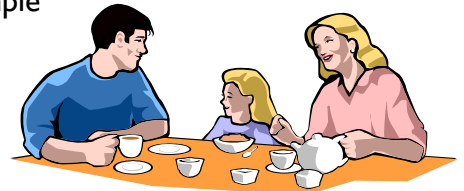


What Can Families Do To Promote Healthy Eating

The whole family can work together to develop healthy eating habits. If we want our children to develop healthy eating habits, parents have to be good models. They need to make good food choices, try new foods, and control portion size. Parents can encourage good eating habits with patience. Let small children take the time they need to learn to hold a spoon, fork, and eventually a knife. Praise teens for the healthy choices they make when they eat away from home.

Here are some other ways to encourage healthy eating:

- Invite children help pick out recipes and shop for healthy ingredients- the spices, food, and other things you need for the recipe.
- Serve new foods, and find healthier ways to prepare familiar foods.
- Let children help prepare meals. Even young children can help with simple tasks. Older children and teens can plan and prepare a meal at times.
- Try to eat at least one meal a day as a family.
- Provide healthy snacks that are easily available.
- Discuss any concerns you have about your family's eating with your health care provider.
- Alert your health care provider to any concerns you or your child have about weight and body image.
- Work with your community to increase access to healthy, affordable food choices.



Resources

- ◊ Family Voices Bright Futures for Families website www.brightfuturesforfamilies.org for additional resources and to subscribe to the Bright Futures: Family Matters free, electronic newsletter
- ◊ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention - Guidelines for School Health Programs to Promote Lifelong Healthy Eating - www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/00042446.htm
- ◊ *Family Matters: Promoting Health and Wellness for Children with Special Health Care Needs Family Booklet* - https://org2.democracyninaction.org/o/6739/images/family_matters_book.pdf
- ◊ Maternal and Child Health Library Knowledge Path
 - Nutrition in Children and Adolescents – www.mchlibrary.info/KnowledgePaths/kp_childnutr.html
- ◊ Choose My Plate – U.S. Department of Agriculture offers personalized eating plans and interactive tools to help assess and plan food choices – www.choosemyplate.gov/

Credits

The American Academy of Pediatrics is the home of Bright Futures. This material is adapted for families from Hagan JF, Shaw JS, Duncan PM, eds, 2008, Bright Futures Guidelines for Health Supervision of Infants, Children, and Adolescents, 3rd Edition, Elk Grove, IL. See “Promoting Healthy Nutrition, pgs 121 – 145. See also: <http://brightfutures.aap.org>

Bright Futures Themes – Promoting...

Family Support ♥ Child Development ♥ Mental Health ♥ Healthy Weight ♥ **Healthy Food & Eating** ♥ Physical Activity ♥ Dental Health ♥ Healthy Sexual Development & Sexuality ♥ Safety & Injury Prevention ♥ Community Relationships & Resources