

# Getting Your Kids to Eat Right



Persuading your child to develop good eating habits can be a challenge. Here are some pointers.

- Start your child's day with a good breakfast. Hot cereal is a better choice than over-sweetened breakfast foods that are heavily advertised to kids.
- Buy snacks that are low in fat, sugar, and salt. Fresh fruit, unbuttered popcorn, whole-grain muffins, juice, milk, and yogurt are tasty, nutritious foods that appeal to kids. Crackers with small amounts of peanut butter or cheese are also acceptable between-meal treats.
- Limit fast-food meals. A steady diet of fast-food menu items tends to be high in fat and generally doesn't provide all the essential nutrients a child needs.
- Don't punish or reward behavior with food. Punishing children by withholding food can deprive them of required nutrients. Rewarding them with food can encourage overeating and weight gain.
- Set a good example. Children can't be expected to adopt good eating habits if parents don't.

## **For nutrition-packed school lunches:**

- Try sandwiches, using turkey, chicken, peanut butter with no added oil or sugar, and low-fat cheese or tuna fish instead of processed lunch meats.
- Pack finger foods like grapes, carrot sticks, celery stalks, and other fruit or crunchy vegetables instead of potato chips. Single-serving cans of fruit or applesauce are also handy ways to round out a lunch.

Beware of convenience foods that claim to be nutritious. Here are some of the traps to look out for.

- **Fruit drinks.** Some contain only a small amount of fruit juice, but a lot of added sugar.
- **Breakfast bars.** These usually contain lots of sugar and very little in the way of nutrition.
- **Pre-popped popcorn.** Some popcorn products have a lot of oil, salt, and contain artificial coloring.

## **Teach Teens to Snack Wisely**

Once kids reach their teens, they tend to eat what they want, when they want it. But these years of rapid growth and change call for added nutrients which might be lacking in diets that are hit-or-miss. And as their bones grow rapidly, teens need plenty of calcium. Adolescent girls need plenty of iron to offset iron lost due to menstrual flow.

If the right foods are available, between-meal snacking can actually boost a teen's intake of those critical nutrients.

- Leftovers, like chicken drumsticks, are high in iron and make good late-night snacks.
- Low-fat milk, yogurt, and cheese can provide needed calcium.
- Keep the kitchen stocked with whole wheat crackers, sliced watermelon, fruit salad, and other ready-to-eat alternatives to junk food.
- Encourage teens to invent their own, easy-to-eat snacks, like "ants on a log"—celery stalks stuffed with peanut butter and dotted with raisins.