

Create healthy eating habits

Children age 3-4 years

Kids love to make their own choices. An easy and fun way to create healthy eating habits is called "I choose, you choose."

This is a good way to teach your child the skills they will need to make good decisions. This is a healthy way to teach kids there are some choices parents or adults get to make (I choose) and some choices kids get to make (You choose).

I choose (Parents)

- What foods we eat.
- Where we eat.
- When we eat.

You choose (Child)

- If you want to eat.
- How much you eat.
- What you want to eat from the food you're given.



Most kids will eat when they're hungry and stop when they're full. You don't need to worry about how much your child eats unless a doctor is worried about their growth or they don't seem to have enough energy. It's normal for your child to:

- Skip a meal or snack sometimes.
- Not eat food because of the shape or color sometimes.
- Say they're full after only a few bites of food.
- Change their mind about what food is their favorite.

Tips to create healthy eating habits for life.

1

Eat meals together as a family as much as you can.

Meals together as a family provide so much more than just dinner. Research shows family meals are one of the best ways to connect with your family.

Family meals can also lower the chance your child will use drugs or alcohol as a teenager or struggle with their mental health.

2

Children need to eat lots of fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and proteins. This helps them become strong and healthy.

3

Provide meals and snacks around the same time every day— and have them eat at the table. Children learn better eating habits with a structured routine. They're also less likely to choke if they sit while they eat instead of carrying food around with them.

4

Feed your child the same meal the rest of your family eats. This helps them learn to try new foods. You don't need to make something else if they don't want to eat the same thing as the rest of the family.

5

Kids are more likely to try new foods when they help make them. Let your child help pick out healthy foods at the store. Kids love to help make meals and snacks. They can help put ingredients in a bowl, stir things, or wash vegetables.

6

Give your child choices at meal times and snacks. For example, let them choose if they want carrots or broccoli with lunch.

7

Let your child stop eating or choose not to eat if they're full. Your child is still growing, but not as fast as they used to. **Some days they will eat less than others. That's okay.** Never force or pressure them to eat. Kids who learn to listen to their bodies and stop eating when they're full have healthier eating habits later in life.

8

Only give your child small amounts of new foods. It can be scary for kids to try new foods. Give 1 new food at a time with other food you know your child likes.

Let your child choose if they want to try the new food or not. Keep giving them new foods even if they don't eat them at first. They will learn to like new things in their own time. You may need to give your child a new food more than 10 times before they eat it.

9

Think about rewards differently. Don't use food as a reward or punishment and don't give kids rewards for trying new foods.

10

Give your child water instead of milk or juice if they're thirsty in between meals or snacks. Milk and juice take up more room in their stomach and make them less hungry for their next snack or meal. It's better for kids to get nutrients from foods rather than liquids.