

## HOW TO: Raise Healthy, Independent Eaters

Childhood is a critical period for the development of eating behaviors and habits that last into adulthood. These habits play a vital role in growth, development, overall health, and the prevention of obesity and other lifelong, diet-related chronic diseases.

It's not just WHAT we feed our kids that matters, but also HOW we handle feeding or eating that's really important in establishing lifelong healthy habits for our kids.

Healthy Eating Research's *Recommendations for Creating Healthy Eating Habits for Kids 2-8* is a set of evidence-based best practices for HOW to feed children.

Supporting children's independence in learning to accept healthful foods makes a difference.



### Hot tip!



The single most effective strategy to get kids to eat healthy food is **repeated exposure**. Kids may need to try something 10-15 times before knowing if they like it or not. This will require patience. It takes time—this can happen over weeks or months and through different preparations of the food.

Read more about the *Recommendations for Creating Healthy Eating Habits for Kids 2-8* at [HealthyEatingResearch.org](https://www.healthyeatingresearch.org). See tips in action on Instagram @HealthyEatingResearch or #HealthyTipsHealthyKids.

## Below are tips to help give your kids autonomy, in turn, helping you raise healthy, independent eaters.

### **Make healthy choices easy by keeping healthy foods in sight, in reach, and easy to eat.**

- ▶ Keep cut vegetables in the refrigerator for a quick snack.
- ▶ Portion healthy snacks into individual-serving size containers and leave them in a basket on the bottom shelf of the pantry (at kids' eye level and within reach).
- ▶ Keep a bowl of fresh fruit on the counter.
- ▶ Limit the number of unhealthy snacks and sweets in the house.

### **Get creative and make food fun!**

- ▶ Invite curiosity by sharing family recipes or cultural foods with your kids.
- ▶ Tell your children a story or find picture books about healthy food, or play a game where kids close their eyes and guess the names of foods by touching, smelling, or tasting.
- ▶ Give foods fun names to get kids excited about trying new things.

### **Get kids involved.**

- ▶ When grocery shopping, allow your children to choose one new fruit or vegetable to try.
- ▶ Before meal prep, let kids choose a vegetable to try based on what's available at home.
- ▶ Have conversations about new foods. Ask kids what they think about foods tried (for example, "Is it thumbs up, thumbs down, or in-between?") and honor their answers.
- ▶ Let kids explore new foods by engaging all their senses (for example, looking, smelling, touching, and tasting.) *If this is not appropriate for your culture, skip it!*
- ▶ Let your children hold, wash, and help prepare foods. Even the youngest can help with food prep by washing and sorting foods.

### **Help kids identify and listen to their hunger or fullness cues.**

- ▶ Talk to kids about how their stomach feels before, during, and after eating.
- ▶ Avoid pressuring kids to finish everything on their plate, which can interfere with self-regulation.

### **Set a positive example by eating healthy at home.**

- ▶ Model healthy eating and moderation.
- ▶ Eat with your children as much as possible.



**Did You Know?** Pressuring kids to finish everything on their plate can interfere with self-regulation. Instead, help them identify and listen to their hunger or fullness cues by talking to them about how their stomach feels before, during, and after eating.