

HOW TO: Set Your Family Up For Healthy Eating Success

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.

Evidence shows that it is important to structure the food environment in ways that provide children with abundant opportunities to learn about and have positive experiences with foods.



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 that can help set your family up for healthy eating success through structure and routine.

☐ Make healthy foods and drinks available to children throughout the day.

- ▶ Keep healthy foods on the counter where they are easily seen and within reach.
- ▶ Always start snack and mealtime by offering water and healthy food.
- ▶ Limit the number of unhealthy snacks and sweets in the house.

☐ Provide guidance that supports healthy choices.

- ▶ Find opportunities to enjoy healthy foods together.
- ▶ Let your children see you make healthy choices for meals and snacks.
- ▶ Encourage your children to eat fruits and veggies, and drink water.
- ▶ Pay attention to [portion sizes](#).
- ▶ Avoid pressuring kids to finish everything on their plate at mealtimes.

☐ Create routines around eating as much as your family's schedule allows and involve kids in implementing these routines.

- ▶ Enjoy meals as a family whenever possible.
- ▶ Maintain a meal and snack routine to limit snacking all day long.
- ▶ Avoid screens and other distractions while eating.



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.



More tips!

Tips to Help with Serving Healthy Portions

- ▶ Offer smaller, [age-appropriate kid-friendly portions](#).
- ▶ Take a 5- to 10-minute break before providing second helpings of favorite or less healthy items.
- ▶ Leave second helpings out of sight in the kitchen or on the stove.

Tips to Engage with your Kids during Mealtime

- ▶ Tell stories at mealtime.
- ▶ Try conversation prompts, asking your children what the best part of their day was, for example.
- ▶ Leave screens and other electronics in another room.