**Savor your food**

Taking time to enjoy your food is not only pleasurable, it also keeps you from eating too much. Encourage your child to be more “mindful” of how she eats with these strategies.

**Eat s-l-o-w-l-y**

Suggest that your youngster put down her fork after each bite. She should chew her food completely and maybe take a drink of water, too. Then, she can pick up her fork for her next bite. In the meantime, enjoy friendly and light conversation together.

**Talk about it**

Focusing on the food can help your child enjoy it more. Trade opinions on color, texture, shape, smell, or taste. Or go around the table and have each person name an adjective to describe a dish. For example, your youngster might call the spaghetti “slippery,” while you label the tomato sauce “chunky,” and your toddler says it’s “red.”

**Tip:** Eliminating distractions (phones, video games, television) will help everyone concentrate on the meal, too.

**Rate your hunger**

To avoid overeating, your youngster needs to understand when she’s really hungry and when she’s full. Ask her to think about a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being super-hungry and 10 being super-full. Before eating, she can rate her hunger (say, a 2), and as she eats, she should stop and rate again. When she gets to 8 (comfortably full), she could put down her fork for good.

**Chores: Stepping up**

Talk about a win-win: If you get your youngster involved in active household chores, he’ll learn responsibility and get exercise. Here are 10 kid-friendly chores to consider.

1. Clean out the hall closet. Organize hats in one bin and gloves and mittens in another.
2. Carry the hamper to the laundry room. Sort whites and colors into separate piles.
3. Set the table. Clear the table. Load the dishwasher.
4. Bring in the mail.
5. Vacuum the carpet. Use a hand-held vacuum for tight spots or for pet hair on sofas.
6. Dust tables and shelves.
7. Shovel snow.
8. Collect trash from trash cans around the house.
9. Take trash cans and recycling bins to and from the curb.
10. Sweep the porch steps.

**Green bean “fries”**

Make green beans your child’s new favorite food with this clever idea. Toss 1 lb. fresh green beans (washed, trimmed) with 1 tbsp. olive oil, 1/2 tsp. salt, and 1/4 tsp. pepper. Place the beans on a baking sheet (lined with parchment paper or coated with nonfat cooking spray). Bake at 375º for 10–15 minutes, until crispy.

**Creative substitutions**

You’re cooking with your youngster and suddenly realize you’re missing an ingredient. Try saying, “Oh, we’re out of oregano. What could we use instead?” Then, brainstorm substitutions, and, if possible, use one of his ideas. He’ll learn that it’s okay to improvise in the kitchen and that the food can turn out just as good—or even better!

**DID YOU KNOW?**

Children with disabilities are more likely to be overweight or obese than other kids. If your youngster has a disability, talk to her PE teacher, doctor, or physical therapist about ways she can be active. You might also look into programs like Special Olympics, wheelchair tennis, or adaptive basketball and baseball.

**Just for fun**

Q: What do snowmen eat for breakfast?
A: Snowflakes!

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Eat in or out?

Eating at restaurants can be fun and delicious—but eating at home is likely to be more nutritious (as well as delicious). When deciding, think about these factors.

Cost. You’ll spend less in the long run by buying food at the supermarket and cooking at home. Plus, you could make enough for leftovers to stretch into the next day. Not to mention, you don’t need to leave a tip!

Nutrients. When you eat at fast-food places and even some restaurants, you’re less likely to have fruits and vegetables. Cooking at home means you can serve healthy side dishes. Then there’s the dessert factor: It’s harder for your child to resist temptation if he sees ice cream or chocolate cake on the menu. Eat at home, and offer melon or a baked apple for dessert instead.

Homemade fitness fun

If kids design their own fitness equipment, they’ll want to use it. Suggest that your youngster try ideas like these.

• Parachute. Let her use markers to decorate an old sheet. Then, she could roll up socks into balls. Spread out the sheet, position family members around the edges, lift the sheet, and bounce the “balls” up and down. Can you keep all the balls on the sheet?

• Weights. Have your youngster layer dried beans and rice in decorative patterns in empty water bottles. Or she might fill the bottles with water and add food coloring to make her favorite color. Seal tightly, and use for bicep curls.

• Target game. Ask your youngster to stuff empty cereal boxes or milk jugs with newspaper. Set them up like bowling pins, and take turns rolling a ball toward them. Score points for each “pin” knocked down.

A package deal

Cooking in foil is a fun and easy way to make healthy meals. Let your child help you fill and fold the packets—and, of course, help eat the results.

Here’s how: Layer ingredients on a rectangle of foil, fold it up, and bake. The packets can be prepared and refrigerated up to a day ahead. The cooking method keeps the food moist by baking the ingredients in their own juices, so you don’t have to add butter or other extra fat.

• In each packet, put a 6-oz. fish fillet (salmon, flounder, or cod work well). Top with potato and carrot chunks, and sprinkle on fresh or dried herbs like thyme, parsley, or chives. Place on a baking sheet, and bake at 400º for 15–20 minutes, until cooked through.

• Place 1 boneless, skinless chicken breast on the foil. Add 1 tsp. Dijon mustard, 1 tsp. olive oil, 1 sliced carrot, 1 sliced zucchini, and ½ tsp. oregano. Bake at 350º for about 30 minutes, until chicken is no longer pink.

Q&A The lowdown on sugar

Q: I’m confused about sugar. I know that cookies have sugar and that fruit also has sugar—are they both bad for my child?

A: Good question! You are right: Both fruit and cookies do contain sugar. But there’s a big difference between eating fruit with naturally occurring sugar and sweets with added sugar.

Fruit is filled with vitamins, minerals, fiber, and water—in addition to fructose (a type of sugar)—making it a healthy part of your youngster’s daily diet. On the other hand, items like cookies, cake, candy, and soda have the sugar but not the nutrients.

Teach your child to be on the lookout for added sugar by reading food labels together. Explain that he should go easy on foods with these words in their ingredient lists: glucose, corn sweetener, corn syrup, high fructose corn syrup, dextrose, malt syrup, and lactose. Also, the higher they are in the ingredient list, the more sugar in the food.

Our purpose

To provide busy parents with practical ways to promote healthy nutrition and physical activity for their children.

Resources for Educators, a division of CCH Incorporated
128 N. Royal Avenue • Front Royal, VA 22630
540-636-4280 • rfecustomer@wolterskluwer.com
www.rfeonline.com

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