

S A M V E D A N A

Developing Good Eating habits in children

Recently on a train journey during my vacations, I was quite amused to see a young mother literally try to force feed her baby girl, who just would not open her mouth for even one bite. The mother was in tears. I felt very bad for the mother who was at her wits end to somehow make the baby eat and stop creating the noise. To my surprise after ten minutes, the crying had stopped. Feeling inquisitive, I turned back and lo behold! what do I see. The little child was glued to a game on her mother's mobile phone and her mother was quietly putting the food into her mouth. The child did not even lift her head to see what she was eating or who was feeding her. And then we complain that our children do not have good eating habit.....

Teaching children healthy eating habits and by modelling these behaviors ourselves, we can help our children maintain a healthy weight and normal growth. Also, the eating habits children pick up when they are young will help them maintain a healthy lifestyle when they are adults.

Eating well for children determines to a large extent the status of their physical and mental development. Mostly children avoid eating well at all times. Parents have to try and inculcate healthy eating habits in children for ensuring their proper growth and development. Different children have different eating patterns and interest. Eating habits of children depend on their age. As at different ages children have different weight and height so accordingly parents should schedule the diet. If children are growing well and are healthy, then no cause for worry.

The habits that children form when they are young are what they will carry with them as adults and further on to last a lifetime. So it is important to nurture good eating habits and expose them to healthy foods, in their younger days, so that they opt for those when they grow up by default. Moreover, as a parent, you can have the most control over your child's food when he/she is very young. If all they eat is healthy food that is what they will prefer when they get older.

HERE ARE WAYS IN WHICH YOU CAN INCULCATE HEALTHY EATING HABITS IN YOUR CHILDREN:



1. Check the refrigerator:

Children eat what they see in the refrigerator and on the shelves. Hence, it is important to store healthy foods, so that your child will not have access to junk snacks and will habitually start liking healthy items. Stop feeding children from tetra packs and plastic bottles. Fresh food works better for children always.

2. Be a role model:

A child learns the behavior patterns and tries to emulate his elders at home. Make sure, you practice what you preach, as your actions have a great effect on your child's responses as they tend to do the same thing that you do. Whenever the family sits together, provide the same healthy set of choices for everyone and don't eat that which you do not intend giving your child. The child will ultimately realize in his later years the importance of healthy eating. Try serving seasonal vegetables and fruits for all the members in the house.

3. Make boring foods interesting:

Children often avoid healthy foods, but when those same foods are made interesting, they have it with joy and even ask for more. For instance, when kids avoid rotis, you can actually fry the rotis in a little oil and add sprinkle spices and some coriander to it and your kid would lick his fingers. Similarly, with apples, you can blend apples in a blender and mix it with milk and some sugar to make a smoothie, for a child who hates eating apples.

4. Do not use food as a reward - ever.

Because if you do, there can be long term implications that may not be in your favour nor in the favour of your child's health. This habit can make his eating habits go weird and also can make him obese as he would judge everything in terms of food. This will make them feel that every outing, every activity, everything they do, must be accompanied by a high calorie snack.

Sending children to bed without any dinner may cause them to worry that they will go hungry. As a result, children may try to eat whenever they get a chance. Similarly, when foods, such as sweets, are used as a reward, children may assume that these foods are better or more valuable than other

foods. For example, telling children that they will get dessert if they eat all of their vegetables sends the wrong message about vegetables.

5. Be well-informed:

Your child is much ahead of you in terms of awareness and curiosity. And if you do not meet his levels, especially when it comes to food, he is sure to eat exactly what you don't want him to. Hence, educate yourself so that when your children do ask for particular foods, you can explain your answer. If you do not want your child to eat junk foods that contain trans fats, make sure you refrain from it too. Be ready with suggestions and explanations when your child asks for something, which you think, is a bad idea.

6. Teach your child to read labels

Take your children to grocery shopping and visit a store with the best quality of produce. Also, teach them the way to read labels and the importance of it and also involve them in the decision making pertaining to kitchen.

7. Food and screen time – separate always

This is one habit which if formed, during childhood, remains with the child as he grows up. Hence, it is important that you inculcate the importance and the sensibility associated with separating watching TV, or computer and eating food.

8. Cook together

Be a chef with your kids helping you in the kitchen on their holidays. Tell them you are trying a health recipe and that way you can make them aware of the way a dish is prepared and they will enjoy food eating as well as preparing.

9. Free them on holidays



You have been restricting them from soft drinks and colas and too many chocolates on a daily basis. But now that they are in a party or on a holiday, you can make exceptions. Children will always want their treats especially when they are with others and on special occasions. Also, binging on their favorite foods, on rare occasions, will not make them fat. Children get fat because they consistently consume more calories than they burn. **That means you should worry about daily patterns, not holidays.**

Keep these tips in mind and see your child grow into a healthy individual who knows to make the right health choices too.

APPROACHES PARENTS CAN TAKE TO DEVELOP HEALTHY EATING HABITS IN THEIR CHILDREN INCLUDE:

- **Guide your family's choices rather than dictate foods.** Make a wide variety of healthy foods available in the house. This practice will help your children learn how to make healthy food choices. Leave the unhealthy choices like soda and juice at the grocery store. Serve water with meals.
- **Encourage your children to eat slowly.** A child can detect hunger and fullness better when they eat slowly. Before offering a second helping or serving, ask your child to wait a few minutes to see if they are truly still hungry. This will give the brain time to register fullness.
- **Eat meals together as a family as often as possible.** Try to make mealtimes pleasant with conversation and sharing, not a time for scolding or arguing. If mealtimes are unpleasant, children may try to eat faster to leave the table as soon as possible. They then may learn to associate eating with stress.
- **Plan for snacks.** Continuous snacking may lead to overeating, but snacks that are planned at specific times during the day can be part of a nutritious diet, without spoiling a child's appetite at meal times. You should make snacks as nutritious as possible, without depriving your children of occasional chips or cookies, especially at parties or other social events.
- **Encourage your children to drink more water.** Over consumption of sweetened drinks and sodas has been linked to increased rates of obesity in children.
- **Make sure your children's meals outside the home are balanced.** Also, select healthier items when dining at restaurants.
- **Pay attention to portion size and ingredients.** Read food labels and limit foods with trans fat. Also, make sure you serve the appropriate portion as indicated on the label.

A child who eats healthy, thinks clear and often has a balanced approach to life.

Happy Parenting!

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