



50 Great Eating Tips for Busy Families

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I would like to share 50 Great Eating Tips for Busy Families that will help children to develop healthy eating habits. Remember that children learn from those around them and so by being a parent role model for eating, we can help them develop habits that will last them a lifetime.

Around the table...

- 1 Don't be a short order cook** for your children. They will learn to hold out for "their foods" (usually the less healthy "kid" foods) and will be even less likely to try new things that you have prepared.
- 2 Avoid battling** with your kids over how much to eat. Remember that the parent's job is to pick and choose what to offer, it is the child's job to pick and choose how much of that to eat. Respect their appetites.
- 3 Keep offering foods** your child may have refused in the past. Especially with the toddlers, they may refuse a food one day and love it the next. Be patient and non-judgmental in your approach.
- 4 Show your own enjoyment** of eating healthy foods. Buy and try new fruits and vegetables that you might not normally eat.
- 5 Don't bribe or reward with food.** Don't use food to try to change behavior. Instead use stickers or find some fun stamps to stamp on their hand or tummy. (Tummy stamps are a great toilet training incentive).
- 6 Watch the portion sizes.** Studies found that giving young children meals that are larger than age-appropriate will generally lead to overeating. Offer small first servings and then offer second servings if they are still hungry.
- 7 Make every effort to have family meals together.** Although life is busy, this does help encourage better eating habits. Studies found that teens who ate dinner at home were more likely to have a healthier diet.
- 8 Turn off the television** during meals and don't allow kids to snack while watching TV. Allowing children to eat with the TV on will usually lead to more calorie consumption.

9 Have children tell one good thing and one bad thing about their day at the dinner table. Developing habits of talking about what is happening in their day helps to bring families closer. Don't use mealtime to argue or nag.

10 For your picky vegetable eaters, offer vegetables and fruits as part of the meals. The reluctant vegetable eater who eats fruit will get some nutritional benefits.

11 Avoid being part of the "clean plate" club. Respect their appetites and allow them to stop when they are not hungry.

In between meals...

12 Plan for snacks and don't allow constant grazing of food. Use fresh fruits and vegetables (carrots, celery with peanut butter, any fruits) as part of the snacks and use less of the typical processed foods choices.

13 Don't use snacks to occupy bored children and don't offer a constant array of snacks in the car. Kids will associate car rides or boredom with eating.

14 Time the snacks so they are not too close to meals. If after school kids are begging for food right before dinner is ready, offer them salad or carrot sticks to eat.

15 Keep healthy food choices handy. Have the fruits out on the kitchen counter. Cut up vegetables and have them front and center in the refrigerator.

16 Keep treat foods out of sight. Keep candy in an area where they are out of reach for children. Foods that are out of sight will not be eaten as readily (by the children or the adults!).

17 If you buy bulk food or snacks, break it down into smaller serving sizes in plastic baggies. We are more likely to eat more out of big bag of food, then when it is portioned as a single serving.

18 Make sure they drink plenty of water with their snacks. Too much juice and certainly soda are empty calorie choices. When offering juice, make sure it is 100% juice and not just "high fructose corn syrup."

19 Work on getting kids to get their "5 a day." If you offer fruit at every meal and a vegetable for one snack and dinner, your kids will get their 5 a day.

20 Put snack choices in 3 groups: Anytime, Sometime and Occasional. *Anytime* snacks would be fruits and vegetables, low-fat yogurt; *Sometime* snacks would be crackers, cheese, nuts, low-fat crackers; *Occasional* snacks would be chips, cookies or candy.

21 Use a smoothie as a healthy snack. Put in fresh fruit, yogurt, even fresh vegetable juices and some flaxseed oil to make a wholesome snack. Freeze grapes or bananas to add in to make your smoothie.

Buying foods...

22 Avoid trans fats in foods. These are the unhealthiest types of fats and can be found on labels as: "hydrogenated" or "partially hydrogenated" types of oils. Find better choices without these fats in many health food stores.

23 Look for more whole grains in foods. Look for "whole wheat" or "100 percent whole wheat" in bread. Try amaranth, quinoa or whole wheat pasta. Add millet to turkey burgers or meat loaf. Eat brown rice rather than white rice.

24 Have children go grocery shopping and pick their fruits and vegetables or ask them to pick a new fruit or vegetable for the family to try.

25 Add good fats to the diet. Use olive oil or canola oil in cooking. Add flaxseed oil to yogurt, smoothies, cooked pasta or salads for a good dose of heart-healthy omega-3 fats.

26 Get to know popular brands that offer healthier snack foods, like Newman's Own, Healthy Valley, Frootie or Kashi.

Eating out...

27 Avoid or limit eating out at the typical fast foods restaurants (you know which ones I am talking about!). Find healthier fast food places in your area that serve roasted chicken with fresh steamed vegetables.

28 Share meals between family members to cut down on portion sizes (and save money!). Add a side of vegetables or salad. Take home leftovers to use for lunch the next day.

29 Watch the soda intake. Negotiate with your kids to make water or milk their choice. Many restaurants offer unlimited soda, so if they choose soda, set the limit to one. Sodas should never be an everyday treat.

Fun school lunch ideas...

30 Cut sandwiches into fun shapes with cookie cutters. Avoid processed meat choices with their nitrates. Health food stores often carry lunch meat choices without nitrates.

31 Other sandwich ideas: Try organic peanut butter with bananas, almond butter, shredded fresh chicken, egg salad with canola mayonnaise. Add grated carrots or zucchini to the sandwich mix.

32 Use tortillas or pita bread and load it up with a combination of rice, beans, cheese and grated vegetables.

33 Make a pasta salad with olive oil and fresh vegetables. Make a rice salad with vegetables and fresh chicken (leftover chicken from the night before works great!).

34 Pack almonds or raisins for snack time at school. Pack celery with peanut butter, carrot sticks with a container of ranch dressing.

35 Pack water or 100% fruit juice for a drink. Freeze the water or fruit juice so it stays cold and keeps the rest of the lunch cold, too.

36 Plan to use leftovers from a healthy dinner for lunch the next day. Use a thermos to keep soups or chili warm for lunch.

37 Make healthy muffins with ingredients like wheat germ, or oatmeal or bran to pack for lunch.

Fun food ideas...

38 Dips can help your kids eat more vegetables. Use low-fat ranch dressing or cut the ranch in half with yogurt. Try hummus dips or black bean dips for another healthy fare.

39 A healthy fruit dip can be made with vanilla yogurt, honey and cinnamon or nutmeg. Skewer fruit on a kabob stick for a fun snack.

40 Make your own sweet potato fries. Slice sweet potatoes into wedges or slices and drizzle with olive oil. Bake in the oven at 375 for 20-30 minutes until done.

41 Quick dinner idea: Buy a whole roasted chicken from the grocery store, shred it up and roll into a whole wheat tortilla with black beans, shredded cheese, tomatoes and lettuce for a complete meal.

42 Cottage cheese in an ice cream cone topped with sliced almonds and fresh or dried fruit makes for a calcium and protein rich snack.

Moving past media...

43 Teach children about the media and advertising. They need to learn that the media and ads do not necessarily have their best interest in mind. Studies have shown that commercials affect kid's food choices.

44 Set limits on TV, computer, video game time. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends less than 2 hours a day of all of these combined. Try limiting to none or less than 1 hour on school nights.

45 Encourage sweaty activity choices for your children. Schedule family outings that include physical activity – a walk, bike ride, or any other favorite family sport.

46 Even on rainy or cold days, kids can find active things to do in the house. Have them learn to use a hacky sack, play with an indoor nerf ball or make up a new dance with your kids.

In your community...

47 Talk to the principal or teacher about food rewards used in classrooms. Candy rewards to complete math problems should not be promoted in schools.

48 Talk to your sports team managers about snack choices brought to team games. If policy is to bring fruit and find healthier choices, all the families on the team will find it easier to do.

49 Have the PTA look at vending machine choices and policy in middle schools and high schools. Check out www.californiaprojectlean.org to find out how policy was formed to cut sodas from the schools.

And finally...

50 Remember that you are the parent and the food choices you make and the way you eat will be modeled by your own children. We don't have to forbid the treats and candy, but we have to teach our children moderation. This teaching of a healthy lifestyle in food and activity is something they will carry with them forever. Yes, they may rebel at times and we don't want to be the food police, but kids eating habits will be very close to how their parents eat. You are the parent!!

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