

Parents' Influence on Children's Eating Habits



As a parent, you play an important role in shaping your children's eating habits. You have a big influence over the family environment where meals take place and the types of foods your children eat. Positive experiences about food early on may help your children develop healthy eating habits later in life. Read on to learn how to positively influence your children's eating habits by creating a positive eating environment and being a good role model.

Creating a positive eating environment

Family meals take place in the home (or the "eating environment"). This eating environment can have a positive or negative impact on your children's eating habits. Here are a few tips to help you create a positive eating environment for your children.

Have regular meal and snack times

Having regular meal and snack times everyday creates a healthy routine. If your children eat whenever they feel like it, they may not be hungry when it's time for a scheduled meal or snack. They may also overeat during the day.

Eat together as a family

Children who eat meals with their family tend to eat healthier foods like fruits, vegetables and whole grains. They are also at lower risk for becoming overweight. However, children who eat in front of the TV tend to make poorer food choices. Eating meals in front of the TV should be avoided as this can lead to overeating and a higher risk of childhood obesity. Learn more about why it is important to [eat together without TV](#).

Avoid pressuring your children to eat

Insisting that your children eat certain foods may actually cause them to eat less. As a parent, you are responsible for providing healthy food choices to your children. Your children should be allowed to decide how much to eat based on how hungry they feel. Are mealtimes a struggle? Say [goodbye to picky eating](#) with these tips.

Avoid using food as a reward or punishment

Eating is a way to nourish our bodies. Using food as a reward or punishment may lead to unhealthy eating habits. Offer a variety of healthy foods and let your children serve themselves without any pressure.

Have healthy foods at home

Make sure to [buy healthy foods](#) when you shop. The foods available in your fridge, freezer, cupboards and pantry are what your children will get used to eating. Use this [menu planning form](#) to help you plan healthy meals as a family!

Being a positive role model

Parents can influence their children's eating habits in a positive way by being a good role model. Here are some tips on how to be a good role model when it comes to food.

Make healthy foods the usual choice

What you eat sets an example for what your children will eat. Enjoy foods from the four Food Groups in Canada's Food Guide every day such as vegetables, fruit, whole grain products, low fat dairy products, lean meats, legumes, eggs and fish. When your children see you eating these foods, they are more likely to want to eat them too. Check out these videos on how to make quick and easy [breakfasts](#), [lunches](#) and [snacks](#).

Limit foods high in calories, fat, sugar and salt

Foods that are high in calories, fat, sugar and salt like cakes, chocolate, cookies, doughnuts, ice cream, French fries, potato chips, pop, sports and energy drinks, and sweetened hot or cold drinks should be eaten less often. When you limit these foods yourself, your children will be less likely to eat them as well. It is important not to label these foods as "bad". They are simply foods to be eaten occasionally and in moderation.

The bottom line

As a parent, you have an important role in shaping your children's eating habits. By creating a positive eating environment and being a good role model, you can help your children develop healthy eating habits that can make a lasting impact on their health. Have questions about healthy eating and your kids?

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Remind your children that healthy eating and regular physical activity can help keep their body and mind feeling good and energized as they grow.

Know when to seek professional help

- Speak to your doctor if you think your young child or teen has low self-esteem or a negative body image. These feelings may be signs of a more serious problem such as depression or an eating disorder. Spotting problems early may help prevent more serious problems later on.

Growing up can be hard at times. As a parent, listening to your children and being supportive can go a long way. Remember it is never too early to promote a healthy body image and positive self-esteem. It's a gift that you can give your children for life!

Have questions about healthy eating and your kids? Call an EatRight Ontario Registered Dietitian at 1-877-510-510-2 or send an [email](#).

Want more information?

[When Eating and Weight are Concerns: A Glimpse at Eating Disorders](#)

[Facts about eating disorders](#) from the Canadian Mental Health Association

[Encouraging a healthy body image](#) from AboutKidsHealth

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