

Healthy Steps

Top Tips for being a healthy role model for your child



You are the most important influence on your child. You can do many things to help your children develop healthy eating habits for life. Offering a variety of foods helps children get the nutrients they need from every food group. They will also be more likely to try new foods and to like more foods. When children develop a taste for many types of foods, it's easier to plan family meals. Cook together, eat together, talk together, and make mealtime a family time!

Show by example

Eat vegetables, fruits, and whole grains with meals or as snacks. Let your child see that you like to munch on raw vegetables and fruit.

Go food shopping together

Shopping for food can teach your child about food and nutrition. Discuss where vegetables, fruits, grains, dairy, and protein foods come from. Let your children make healthy choices.

Get creative in the kitchen

Cut food into fun and easy shapes with biscuit cutters. Name a food your child helps make. Serve "Jessie's Salad" or "Jake's Sweet Potatoes" for dinner. Encourage your child to invent new snacks. Make your own trail mixes from dry whole-grain, low-sugar cereal and dried fruit.

Offer the same foods for everyone

Stop making different dishes to please children. It's easier to plan family meals when everyone eats the same foods.

Reward with attention, not food

Show your love with hugs and kisses. Comfort with hugs and talks. Choose not to offer sweets as rewards. It lets your child think sweets or dessert foods are better than other foods.

Focus on each other at the table

Talk about fun and happy things at mealtime. Turn off the television. Take phone calls later. Try to make eating meals a stress-free time.

Listen to your child

If your child says he or she is hungry, offer a small, healthy snack—even if it is not a scheduled time to eat. Offer choices. Ask "Which would you like for dinner: broccoli or cauliflower?" instead of "Do you want broccoli for dinner?"

Limit screen time

Allow no more than 2 hours a day of screen time like TV and computer games.

Encourage physical activity

Make physical activity fun for the whole family. Involve your children in the planning. Walk, run, and play with your child—join in! Your children will love you being part of the games. Don't forget to use your safety gear, like bike helmets.

Be a good food role model

Try new foods yourself. Describe its taste, texture, and smell. Offer one new food at a time. Serve something your child likes along with the new food. Offer new foods at the beginning of a meal, when your child is very hungry.