

Teaching Good Food Habits

Like reading and writing, brushing teeth, and hand washing, learning good food habits will help your child live a healthy life. Here are some tips.

Give your child enough table time.

Does your child seem to dawdle at the table? That's normal. Young children don't have the muscle development or skills to eat as fast as you. They still need practice with eating utensils. Eat at a pace that allows you to enjoy your food. It takes about 20 minutes for the stomach to feel full. Rushing mealtime only leads to frustration for you, your child, and others!

Be a good role model. Your child watches what you eat and how you eat it!

If you eat and enjoy a variety of foods, chances are your child will try them too - if not now, then later. It's not just what you say, it's also what you do. Remember most children want to grow up doing what others do.



Skip the urge to reward, punish, or calm your child with food.

Have you ever been tempted to say: "Clean your plate so you can play," "No dessert until you eat your vegetables," or "Stop crying, and I'll give you a cookie"?

Remarks like these may lead kids to have eating problems. They may create conflict and struggles between you and your child at the table.

- Eating for parental approval or love teaches kids unhealthy attitudes about food and themselves.
- Rewarding a clean plate teaches them to ignore body signals, and may lead to overeating.
- Offering one food (dessert) as a reward for eating another food (veggies) makes some foods seem better. This does not help children like veggies.
- Getting a food treat to feel better teaches kids to relieve bad feelings by eating. This may lead to eating too much later.

Instead use a non-food approach.

Reward your child with attention and kind words. Comfort with hugs and talk. Drop the "clean plate club."

- Parents control foods that enter the house and how they are prepared.
- Parents control what and when foods are offered to their children.
- Children decide if and how much of the offered food is eaten.

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A Healthy Place To Eat Is...

Caring, calm, and respectful...

- Focus mealtime on eating and family talks that include your child.
- Turn off the TV.
- Plan quiet time for eating so your child comes to the table relaxed.

Comfortable and safe from injury...

- Always stay with a young child who is eating, even if you have to do other tasks.
- Get a stable, comfortable, child-size chair. A counter stool without back support isn't safe.
- Get easy-to-hold, unbreakable child-size utensils, plates, and cups.

Safe from choking...

- For a child under age four, avoid hard, small, whole foods, like popcorn, nuts, seeds, and hard candy. Slice foods such as hot dogs, grapes, and raw carrots in small strips.
- Teach your child to chew foods well before swallowing them so he or she won't choke.
- Be careful with sticky foods like peanut butter. Spread a thin layer on bread, rather than a thick layer, to reduce risk of choking.

