
Make Healthy Eating **FUN** for Kids!



The “Food” Fight: Recognizing the Problem

Healthy eating is more important than ever before. More and more kids are becoming overweight every day. The extra pounds “weigh them down,” both physically and emotionally making them vulnerable to serious illnesses (like diabetes, heart problems, and many others) that can affect their quality of life well into the future. It also makes it difficult for them to keep up with peers and they are often shunned or teased, which impacts their body image, self-esteem, social development, and emotional well-being. This can lead to long-term emotional problems.



Fruit vs. Fruit Cake: Nutrition Is Key

Eating healthy is a key element of staying healthy, much like exercise and genes. But it’s easier said than done. Our taste buds are tempted around every corner and busy

schedules often make it hard to sit down to regular homemade meals around the family dinner table. It's tempting to grab some fast food outside of home when we are in a rush, and our increasingly inactive lifestyles rub off on our kids, reinforcing a tendency to eat more and exercise less.



Ingredients for Healthy Eating

There are several things we can do to change that cycle and help our kids develop healthy eating habits.

1. Two Bites Don't Make a Wrong: Eating the Right Amount of the Right Foods

- **Teach Kids the Virtues of Nutrition**

Not eating too much, or too much of the "wrong" foods can be hard, especially for youngsters, who do not know enough about nutrition to make healthy choices. Teach children some simple facts (see *Food Facts* below) about nutrition and calories to make it easier. Encourage them to read up on their own to discover why it's

important to eat healthily and how good nutrition can affect their health, well-being, and relationships with others today and for the rest of their lives.

Also, set an example by demonstrating healthy eating with the foods you buy and the meals you serve around the dinner table. Finally, don't forget to make sure that kids combine healthy foods with plenty of regular physical activity.



- **Reinforce the Message and Pour a Healthy Serving of Fun Into It**

Remind children regularly why it is important for them to eat healthily. Because eating right can seem like a chore at times, to make it more of a treat, invent some simple, creative ways to make it fun and reward kids for sticking to good eating habits (see *Healthy Eating Guide* below). Make them feel like a part of a team effort when it comes to all aspects of eating.

2. It's Not Always What Your Kids Are Eating... Sometimes It's What's Eating YOUR KIDS...

- **“Comfort Food” – The Emotional Triggers of Overeating**

Sometimes a bigger reason lurks behind a child's unhealthy eating habits. With the complexity of our modern world, children face constant pressures from all directions and often find themselves overwhelmed. Bullying at school, academic pressure, problems with friends, dating woes, loss of a loved one, divorce, or fear of war and terrorism – these and many other pressures can cause a lot of stress. Like adults, children handle stress differently. Some reach for the cookie jar, turning to “comfort food” when they feel anxious, frightened, lonely, or depressed.

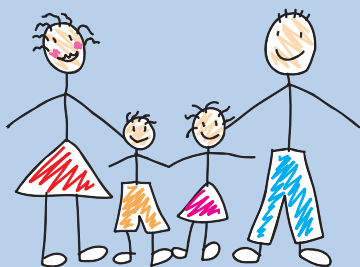


You can substitute the comfort and support your children may be looking for in food by staying actively involved in their lives, attuned to their thoughts and feelings. Talking

through problems with your kids and giving them positive reinforcement can diminish reliance on “comfort food,” helping them find more healthy ways to resolve issues.

It is important to keep in mind too that overeating is not the only slippery slope emotional problems can lead to. The opposite can also occur – under tremendous pressure to fit in, some kids under-eat or starve to achieve what they consider a “desirable” body image. It is important to be aware and on the lookout for this extreme as well.

Overeating or undereating on a regular basis may signal severe emotional distress or an eating disorder. Eating disorders have become more and more common among kids in recent years. For warning signs and steps you can take if your child is struggling with an eating disorder, see *Spotting and Handling a Severe Emotional Problem/Eating Disorder* below.



national family month™

- **NATIONAL FAMILY MONTH™**
A Recipe for Change
Sitting down to dinner as a family is not only a good way to keep an eye on what your kids are eating. It is also one of the most effective

ways to find out what they are feeling. Sharing family meals is an opportunity to ensure they are eating nutritious meals, while also staying on top of what's going on in their lives, so you can provide support and valuable advice that can help steer them in the right direction as they work to overcome problems.



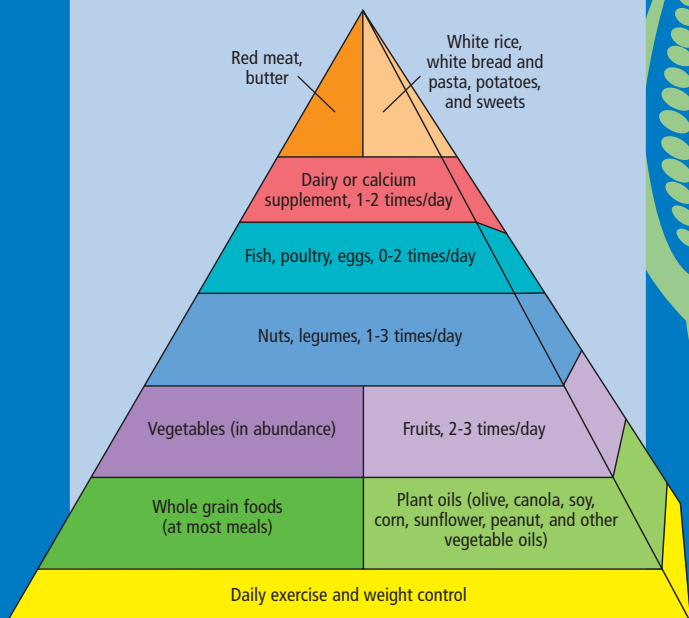
National Family Month™ (which runs between Mother's Day and Father's Day) is a great time to start a year-long habit of spending more time eating home-cooked meals together. It is a great occasion for parents to reconnect with their kids, build stronger bonds, and maintain closeness. National Family Month was created by KidsPeace*, a children's charity with more than 50 centers nationwide and over a century of experience in helping young people overcome the crises and everyday problems of growing up.

Food Facts

Daily calories different groups of children need to stay healthy (depending on activity level):

	Girls	Boys
Ages 2-3	1,000 – 1,400	1,000 – 1,400
Ages 4-8	1,200 – 1,800	1,400 – 2,000
Ages 9-13	1,600 – 2,200	1,800 – 2,600
Ages 14-18	1,800 – 2,400	2,200 – 3,200

Food Pyramid



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Fun food trivia:

- Carrots give you night vision: Vitamin A is known to prevent "night blindness", and carrots are loaded with Vitamin A.
- Almonds are members of the peach family.

Healthy Eating Guide

- **Take time out** to sit down with your family for a wholesome, nutritious homemade meal together – “Family Dinner Nights” two or three times a week are a good start.
- **Make food-consciousness fun** – prepare shopping lists with essential items from each food group and ask your kids to participate.
- **Shop frequently and focus on fresh fruits and veggies** over processed or ready-made products.
- **Involve your kids in grocery shopping** – clever games like a “treasure hunt” for ingredients of a healthy recipe with points, “prizes,” or extra allowance can help get them in the spirit.
- **Take part in team efforts** as a family to prepare a different healthy and tasty dish each night.
- **Gradually reduce high-fat snacks and junk food** in your home, as well as fast-food – to minimize resistance, create an occasional “fast-food family night” to reward your kids for sticking to healthy food the rest of the time.
- **Set a good example** by eating healthy meals and portions – sharing a fun “healthy food fact” at every meal helps reinforce sound food choices.
- **Take advantage of family meals** to talk to your kids about their day, experiences, problems, and triumphs, offering support and advice that can help them overcome hurdles.

The “Comfort Food” Substitute


- **Talk to your kids**, especially if you suspect they may be struggling with a persistent, severe emotional issue.



- **Discuss the feelings and thoughts** that may be leading your child to certain behaviors or eating patterns.
- **Don't be judgmental** – offer your kids unconditional love and support, assuring them of their value.
- **Always keep the lines of communication open** and let your kids know they can come to you anytime with anything.
- **Encourage your kids to share their feelings** and concerns instead of holding them in or trying to deny them.
- **Direct your kids to KidsPeace's www.TeenCentral.Net** – a unique, anonymous problem-solving web site – where they can get more tips on eating healthy, as well as a sympathetic ear, a helping hand from an expert, or feedback from peers when struggling with a tough problem. **TeenCentral.Net is SAFE and FREE.**



Spotting and Handling a Severe Emotional Problem/Eating Disorder

- Watch out for:
 - Eating frequently and consuming more food than is necessary to feel full
 - Binge eating (eating large quantities of food in short periods of time), often in secrecy, while feeling out of control
 - Extreme concern with weight and body shape and intense fear of weight gain
 - Sudden unexplained intense weight gain
 - Sudden unexplained abnormal weight loss
 - Feelings of shame, disgust or guilt after a binge
 - Purging (self-induced vomiting, laxative or diuretic abuse), fasting or compulsive exercise
 - Slowed heart rate and low blood pressure
 - Muscle loss and weakness
 - Heart irregularity or failure due to electrolyte imbalances and dehydration; gastrointestinal problems, such as stomach rupture, esophageal inflammation or rupture, stomach ulcers; tooth decay and staining
 - If you suspect your child may have an eating disorder, seek help from a family doctor or contact KidsPeace (www.kidspeace.org).
 - Another excellent site to visit for complete information on eating disorders is <http://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org>.
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This yearlong “Make Healthy Eating Fun for Kids” campaign is supported by KidsPeace, TeenCentral.Net, Mass Connections, Pactiv, Quaker Oats, and Tropicana.

***KidsPeace** is a national children’s charity with 63 centers nationwide, which has been working for over a century to help kids and families live healthier, happier lives. If you would like to make a donation to support this campaign or kids in crisis across America, visit www.kidspeace.org. KidsPeace exists to give kids peace.

Additional resources:

For more information on eating disorders for both adults and children please visit: <http://www.kidspeace.org>
<http://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org>

