

Health Tips for Parents

FEBRUARY 2015 | VOLUME 109

How can I help my child eat healthier?

By encouraging healthy eating habits starting at a young age, parents can impact their children's lifelong relationship with food and help them grow into healthy adults.



Healthy eating can impact a child's energy, mood, mind and overall health. "There are several easy steps parents can take to encourage and instill good eating habits," advises Cambria Garell, MD,

assistant medical director for the UCLA *Fit for Healthy Weight* program.

Offer a healthy, balanced diet with meals and snacks that are rich in nutrients and minerals. Half of your child's plate should contain fruits and vegetables, one quarter should contain whole grains and the other quarter should be foods high in protein. By making plenty of fruits, vegetables, whole grain snacks and healthy beverages (like water) easily accessible, parents can help their child choose foods that are healthy and avoid foods high in sugar, salt, high-fructose corn syrup, hydrogenated oils and saturated/trans fats.

Cook more meals at home, have regular meal times and get your kids involved. By cooking at home, instead

of going out for meals, parents have control over food choices, portion size and when meals or snacks are served. When kids are involved in shopping for and cooking meals, parents can teach them the nutritional value of each food as well as have important family time.

Role model healthy eating habits. Children learn from their parent's actions, including leading a healthy lifestyle.

Control portion size. Exact portion sizes differ depending on age, gender, weight and height, but a rough estimate of portion size is a one-hand fist size for fruits, vegetables, pastas and beans and a palm-size for proteins.

Increase physical activity and limit TV and computer time. Exercise is an important component of a healthy lifestyle. By reducing screen time, kids can avoid unnecessary empty calories from snacking in front of the TV and be more inclined to increase physical activity by going outside.



5-2-1-0 Blast-Off every day to healthy eating

- 5 or more servings of fruits and vegetables
- 2 hours or less of recreational screen time
- 1 hour or more of physical activity per day
- 0 servings of sweetened beverages like soda, juice and sports drinks



Support a healthy lifestyle

"By introducing your child at an early age to a healthy lifestyle, parents can help their child prevent obesity, diabetes and heart disease," says Dr. Garell. "The family home environment should support a healthy lifestyle for the entire family."

All health and health-related information contained in this publication is intended to be general in nature and should not be used as a substitute for a visit with a healthcare professional. **Subscribe to Health Tips for Parents at uclahealth.org/enews.**