Be a Healthy Role model for Children

School is out and kids are spending more time at home. Use this extra family time to steer kids toward healthier choices. Parents and other adults in the family are great influences for children. You can do many things to help your kids develop healthy eating habits for life.

Lead by Example

Children often mimic their parents and other care-givers: let your kids see you making and enjoying healthy food choices. Eat plenty of fruits and vegetables with and between meals. Choose whole grains and low-fat dairy. Skip the sugary drinks, such as sodas, sweetened teas or sports drinks. Snack on raw (and seasonal!), grab-and-go fruits and vegetables such as peaches, plums, carrots, and sugar-snap peas.

Shop Together; Fix a Meal Together

Take your children food shopping. The farmers market is a great place to teach your children about nutrition and where food comes from. Roam the market, talk to vendors, and let kids choose a new fruit or vegetable that they want to try. In the kitchen, give children safe tasks to involve them in preparing the meal.

Keep dinner simple

Prepare only one family meal and keep it balanced with plenty of fruits and vegetables. Don't be the "short order cook" by making different dishes to please children. Offer choices in meal planning. Ask: "Do you want broccoli or cauliflower?" instead of, "Do you want broccoli with dinner?"

Keep meal time happy

Dine together. Turn off the television and cell phones so that everyone can focus on the meal and each other. Be the first one to put away your phone to show that you are committed to spending quality time together.

Encourage Physical Activity

Go outside and play! Limit "screen time" (TV and computer games) to less than 2 hours each day. Plan a regular outdoor activity with your kids. Don't stand on the side lines, get in on the action with them! Practice proper sports safety by wearing the appropriate safety gear, such as helmets for bike riding or padding for roller skating. Use sunscreen, and give kids plenty of water to beat the heat.

Cut down on sweet treats

Summer vacation brings more chances for sugary treats, like sodas, sports and energy drinks, juice drinks, cake, cookies, ice cream, candy and other sweets. Limit the amount of food and beverages with added sugar that you and the kids eat and drink. These items are high in calories and low in nutrients.

Serve Smaller Portions

Show kids that small sizes can be satisfying. Use smaller bowls and plates to make servings look larger. Have kids share a candy bar or split a candy bar a two slices of pie instead of having one each. Serve ¼ to ½ cup ice cream instead of multiple scoops. Eat and enjoy smaller portions to help kids develop healthier habits.

Sip Smarter

Offer water, 100% juice or low-fat milk when your child is thirsty instead of soda, lemonades, iced teas, or fruit-flavored drinks. Water is the best way to keep hydrated, even on really hot days.

Keep fruits and veggies within reach

Make fruits and vegetables the default go-to snack by making them easy to see and access. Keep fresh berries, cut-up melon, and carrot or celery sticks in the refrigerator. Place apples, peaches and plums in a bowl on the counter.

Treats should be Treats

Sweet treats should not be an everyday food. Limit children's favorite sweets for special occasions and not the first thing they grab to eat. Make fruit the everyday dessert. Serve baked apples and bananas, whole grapes or 100% juice for a refreshing and frosty treat.

Make food fun

Change your kids’ perception of “fun foods.” Make a smiley face on a plate with a peeled banana and some raisins. Use different cookie cutters to cut sandwiches or fruit slices, such as a watermelon or a honeydew melon into fun and familiar shapes.

Reward kids in healthy ways

Don't use candy or other sweets as a reward for good behavior. Choose comforting hugs, fun and special activities, or non-food rewards such as stickers to make children feel special.

Avoid Check-out Candy

Keep a look out for candy-free checkout lanes at the grocery store to avoid last-minute temptations. Keep kids busy while waiting in line at the check out to prevent them from reaching for the sweets nearby. Ask them to help unload the cart or engage them in conversation.
Spice up Your Summer Vegetables!

Cucumber

- For the best buy, choose firm, unspotted cucumbers. Buy cucumbers in season during the summer to keep prices low.
- Cucumbers can be stored in the refrigerator for up to one week, but do not wash before storing. Rinse and dry well before eating.
- For more nutrition, try eating them with the peel on! To start out, try eating cucumbers with part of the peel left on.
- Cucumbers are best when eaten raw, or just barely cooked. They contain a lot of water, and are also high in fiber.

Cucumber: Four Fun Facts

1. Bad Breath Be Gone: Cucumber contains a chemical that kills the bacteria that cause bad breath. Cucumber water tastes great too.
2. Cleaning Product: Use cucumber to erase pen and crayon, polish shoes; it makes windows and mirrors shine too!
3. Sunburn Relief: Similar to aloe, the inside of cucumbers are cool, water, and jelly-like in consistency which is great for soothing a sunburn.
4. Green Pest Repellent: Place a few slices of cucumber in your garden to keep pests away.

Sources: jsyfruitveggies.org, USDA household food facts sheets

Sweet and Spicy Cucumbers

Yield: 6 servings

Ingredients:
- 3 medium cucumbers, cut into slices
- 1/2 red onion chopped
- 1/2 cup red wine vinegar
- 2 tablespoons sugar
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon red pepper flakes

Instructions:
1. Combine the cucumbers and the red onion in a large bowl
2. In a small bowl, stir together 1/2 cup water, vinegar, sugar, salt, and red pepper flakes
3. Toss the cucumbers and onion with the dressing
4. Serve Chilled and enjoy!
5. Refrigerate leftovers.

Source: NYC Department of Health’s Stellar Farmers Market Program

Red Onion

- To get your money’s worth, look for an onion without spots, and without sprouts.
- Remove not only the papery skin from an onion before preparing to eat, also remove the first layer.
- Onions can be stored for up to 2 weeks in a cool, dry place. Keep them away from potatoes, the gases from the onions cause potatoes to grow and rot faster than normal!
- Onions contain potassium, which is good for a healthy heart.
- Red onions are sweet and mild, and best for uncooked dishes.
- Yellow and white onions have a stronger flavor that is tastiest after cooking.

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Source for page 1: www.choosemyplate.gov