

Healthy Eating Habits

Many families are looking for ideas on how they can improve their family's eating habits. Making changes that last takes time. Habits are easier to make when changes are made together as a family. Pick one or two ideas from this handout to help your family improve eating habits.

Creating meal patterns

- Define specific roles for the parents and child at meal times. The parent will choose what, when, and where foods are offered. The child will decide whether and how much they will eat.
- Provide meals and snacks on a regular schedule. Children should eat 3 meals and 2 to 3 snacks each day. Only offer water between meal and snack times.
- Serve snacks that are mini meals. Use foods from 2 or 3 food groups to create balanced snacks.
- Eat together as a family. Children will learn to make healthy choices by watching their parents. Allow everyone to serve themselves and practice stopping when they are full.
- Slow down when eating. It takes 20 minutes once a child starts eating to feel full.
- It can be easy to overeat if you are focused on something else. Avoid distractions while eating, especially screen time.
- All foods can be a part of a healthy diet. Avoid calling foods “junk food” or “bad.”
- Use nonfood items as rewards. Try activity-related rewards, like a family walk, time at the park or swimming pool time. Items like a ball, kite or Frisbee are healthy rewards, too.



- Some children eat because they are bored or dealing with emotions, like being sad or upset. Talk with your child about activities they can do when they are bored and how to cope with their feelings.
- Include your whole family in food preparation and cooking.
- It can be challenging to find healthy meals when eating out, so make eating at restaurants and fast food an occasional special treat.
- Take a family trip to the farmer's market or to a garden to learn more about where your food comes from.

Selecting food

- Avoid grocery shopping when you are hungry.
- Serve meals that have a protein source, grains, fruit, vegetables and dairy.
 - Proteins: meat, poultry, fish, tofu, beans, eggs or nuts.
 - Grains: choose whole grain breads, pasta, rice and cereals.

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- Fruits and vegetables: choose a variety of colors.
- Dairy: milk, yogurt or cheese. If your family does not eat dairy, talk to your doctor or dietitian about ways to get enough calcium and vitamin D.
- Make about half your plate fruit and vegetables.
- Fat is an important part of a healthy diet. Incorporate fish, nuts, avocado and oils into meals and snacks.
- Limit sugary beverages like soda and juice.
- Make it easy for your child to make healthful snack choices by having fruits and vegetables on hand.

To Learn More

- www.seattlechildrens.org
- Your child's healthcare provider

Seattle Children's will make this information available in alternate formats upon request. Call Marketing Communications at 206-987-5323.

This handout has been reviewed by clinical staff at Seattle Children's. However, your child's needs are unique. Before you act or rely upon this information, please talk with your child's healthcare provider.

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