



## Tipsheet: 5 Ways to Teach Kids Healthy Eating Habits

Good eating and fitness habits begin at an early age. Some suggestions for parents to help kids learn healthy traditions at home include:

### 5 Ways to Teach Kids Healthy Eating Habits

- 1. Be a good role model.**  
If your normal breakfast is a quick cup of coffee, don't be surprised if your kids skip their morning meal. Make an effort to take time for a nourishing breakfast.
- 2. Find other rewards.**  
Food should be comforting when it satisfies hunger, but should not be used as a substitute for other needs. A cranky toddler may calm down when you hand her a cookie, but a hug or a story might work just as well. Consider the message you're sending your child: when you're cranky, bored, tired, upset—eat! Help them learn to eat only when they're hungry.
- 3. Don't buy junk food.**  
You have control over the types of food you allow in your house. If you don't buy junk food, your kids won't be able to eat it—at least not at home. As simple as this seems, it is the most effective tool you have to use for limiting junk food.
- 4. Set a regular time and place to dine.**  
Many of us associate eating with other activities, such as watching TV or going to the movies. Soon we find that activities like turning on the TV also turn on our desire to eat. Help your family break the habit of automatic eating by making one simple rule—eat only while seated at the dining table.
- 5. Be flexible.**  
Even with good habits at home, your kids will probably eat junk food elsewhere. If you forbid your children to eat any chips and other not-so-healthy snacks, don't be surprised if they crave that kind of food even more. An occasional bag of chips or a fast-food meal won't kill anyone. Try to make nutritionally-empty foods the exception, not the rule.

### 5 Steps to Family Fitness

- 1. Buy active toys.**  
Purchase only toys that require active participation: bikes, push toys, jump ropes, climbing structures, jump ropes, soccer balls, scooters, roller skates, etc.
- 2. Stay active together.**  
Plan physically-active leisure time for your family, such as a hike at a park, a bicycle tour of your neighborhood, etc.
- 3. Take an adventure walk.**  
Turn your family walk into an adventure. Try a treasure hunt: give each child a list of 5-10 items (a leaf, twig, bottlecap, etc.) and see who can collect the most treasures during the walk.
- 4. Plan stormy-day play.**  
Turn on the stereo and have a dance contest, or play a videotape and let your children exercise with their favorite cartoon characters.
- 5. Keep playtime lively.**  
Limit the amount of time family members spend watching TV and playing video games. Instead, promote active playtime with traditional games like "duck-duck-goose," tag, hopscotch, hide-and-seek, etc.

**Source:** YMCA Minneapolis. For more information about YMCA programs and services, call 612-371-8700.

**Resources:** [United Way 2-1-1™](#) is a free and confidential, 24-hour information/referral line that can connect you to helpful programs and resources in our community. Just dial 2-1-1 or 651-291-0211.