

# 9 TIPS to Help Your Kids Eat RIGHT

Open your newspaper and it hits you right in the face: Many kids are too fat. Their bones are going soft. They should be eating more vegetables, whole grains, and fruit—but yours are eating Oreos and Kool-Aid. You count it a good day if you sneak a carrot into the lunchbox. So many kids seem doomed to a future of heart disease and diabetes.

How bad is the problem? The Centers for Disease Control estimates that the number of overweight grade-school kids has increased from about 4 percent to nearly 19 percent in the last thirty years. Why are kids getting fatter when we're so much smarter about nutrition? Barb Able, a registered dietician with the Shawnee Mission Medical Center, says sheer abundance is a problem. "In our culture, food is everywhere. It's easy to eat without thinking about what we're eating or how much we're eating."

Shelly Summar, a registered dietician who coordinates the weight management program at Children's Mercy Hospital, agrees: "Here in America, we feel like we have to be surrounded by food." She says many kids have lost the ability to monitor their own hunger "because they're so used to eating all the time."

That's the bad news. But experts say parents can stem the tide of obesity and poor nutrition. Let's look at nine things you can do, starting today, to help your kids eat better.

Why are kids getting fatter when we're so much smarter about nutrition?

## 1...Belly Up to the Salad Bar

Nutritionists agree that setting an example is the best thing you can do to help kids make better choices. It may not be the easiest fix, but it's long lasting and will benefit everyone in the family. Sally Berry Brown is a registered dietician and the president of Bodyfuel, Inc., a nutrition and wellness consultation service. She says the parent's approach makes the difference. Show your children that you eat right "not because you're on a diet, but you really enjoy these wonderful salads and fresh grilled vegetables."

## 2...Keep the Cupboard Bare

Summar advises parents to take stock of what's in the pantry. Are the options healthy choices? "If not, rethink your buying patterns," says Summar. It's easier to stock appropriate foods than to keep saying no all the time. Focus especially on the after-school hour. When kids get home, says Able, "they're going to be starving, and they're going to go for the first thing



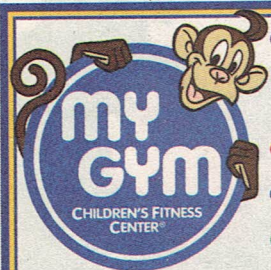
that's available to them." Take advantage of their hunger by stocking that first-stop snack zone with low-fat cheese and crackers, cut-up fruit, or carrots with dip.

## 3...Get 'Em Involved

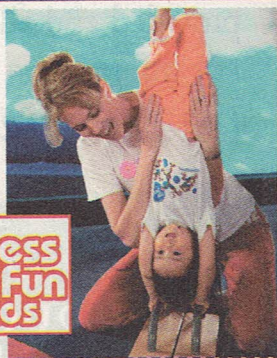
Most kids enjoy cooking, and they're more likely to eat something they've made or chosen themselves. Berry Brown says kids should help buy food as well. A local farmers' market or home garden opens their eyes to the variety available and shows them how food is brought to the table.

## 4...Play to Their Interests

Children love trying foods connected to their favorite books or movies. My daughter would have grimaced at a chunky, veggie-laden stew, but once we saw *Ratatouille*, she insisted I make it. Build dinners around themes like ancient Egypt or medieval times, and tie them in to the family Friday-night rental.



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### FAT FAMILIES THIN FAMILIES

*How to Save Your Family from the Obesity Trap*

By Amy Hendel, R-PA



It's common knowledge poor eating choices lead to weight issues, but what's not often discussed is how unhealthy behaviors are usually (and unwittingly) passed to children by their well-intentioned parents. Weight management- for children and adolescents- is not an individual issue but rather one a family should acknowledge. Until now, family eating habits have rarely been addressed, but Amy Hendel has written a book that can help families fight against obesity, one meal at a time. \$24.95 (Benbella Books)

### 5...Variety, Variety!

If your picky eater hates cooked broccoli, try it raw, suggests Able. Collect different recipes for preparing foods, and try various food shapes, sauces and dips. Scout groceries like Whole Foods for varieties you haven't seen before. These days even the corner shop carries Ugli fruit, papayas and fingerling potatoes. But, she cautions, "Don't offer new foods when they're tired or cranky." Keep the experience positive and light-hearted.

### 6...Bake It In

Try adding pureed cooked carrots or peppers to your homemade marinara for extra flavor and nutrition. Or whip up a special smoothie loaded with berries and bananas. It's also easy to sneak carrots, pumpkin and zucchini into muffins or breads.

### 7... Don't Say No—Say When

"I encourage limiting foods with little or no nutritional value," says Summar, but denying children their favorites incites resentment. "If we have cookies, they know the limit is two," she says of her own kids. Set guidelines in place before you buy the occasional dessert so that kids know how much they're allowed to eat and how often.

### 8... Use the Half Rule

Sometimes the reluctant child can be eased into a change gradually. Make pancakes with half white flour and half whole wheat; mix whole-grain pasta with white pasta; or replace desserts with fruit every other day, until the child gets used to the new way of doing things.

### 9...Don't Knock Baby Steps

"Small steps are fine," says Summar. Make the one or two changes you know you can make—say, switch from pop to juice, or cut out potato chips—and stick to them. "If you make one change, you are going to make huge health improvements," Summar says. "Be confident. You *can* do it." Before you know it, other changes will follow. In a few months' time, you'll find that your family has established new habits that will keep everyone healthy and happy. And in the end, that's the goal you're shooting for. ■

*Claire Caterer is a freelance writer and mother who makes her home in Shawnee.*

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