

Getting Your Kids to Eat Healthy Foods

Healthy Eating Tips for Parents of Preschoolers

How can I help my child eat more fruits and vegetables?

Role modeling. They learn from watching you. Eat fruits and veggies and your kids will too.

Eat together. Let your child see you enjoying fruits and vegetables at meals and snacks.
Take it with you. Show your child how whole fruit is a great snack to eat at the park or in the shopping mall. Put apples, oranges, or bananas in your bag for quick snacks.
Share the adventure. Try new fruits and vegetables together.
Fix them together. Teach your child to tear lettuce or add veggie toppings to pizza.

Why does it matter what I do?

They learn by watching you. Kids get curious when they see you eating fruits or vegetables. Before you know it, they'll want to taste what you are having.
You teach them lessons they'll use for life. It's normal for 2- to 5-year-olds to be "picky eaters." Help them increase the types of fruits and vegetables they like by setting a good example.

What kinds should we eat?

Fresh, frozen, and canned fruits and vegetables are all smart choices. Buy some of each to last until your next shopping trip.
Frozen vegetables have as many vitamins and minerals as fresh. Choose packages that contain vegetables and nothing else--no added fat, salt, or sugars.
Buy canned fruits that are packed in "100% juice" or water.
Rinse canned beans and vegetables with cold water to make them lower in salt.
Look for canned vegetables that say "No added salt" on the front of the can. Buy them when they go on sale.
Cooked vegetables or ripe fruits that are cut into small pieces are easy for your child to eat.
Cut whole grapes and cherry tomatoes into smaller pieces to prevent choking.

Eating Together

It takes a little work to bring everyone together for meals. But it's worth it and the whole family eats better.

Start eating meals together as a family when your kids are young. This way, it becomes a habit.
Plan when you will eat together as a family. Write it on your calendar.
You may not be able to eat together every day. Try to have family meals at least four times a week.

How to make family meals happy

Focus on the meal and each other. Turn off the television. Take phone calls later.
Talk about fun and happy things. Try to make meals a stress-free time.
Encourage your child to try foods. But, don't lecture or force your child to eat.

Fast family meals

Cook it fast on busy nights. Try stir-fried meat and vegetables, quick soups, or sandwiches.
Do some tasks the day before. Wash and cut vegetables or make a fruit salad. Cook lean ground beef or turkey for burritos or chili. Store everything in the fridge until ready to use.

Cooking Together

Teach your kids to create healthy meals. It's a lesson they'll use for life.

Kids like to try foods they help make. It's a great way to encourage your child to eat fruits and vegetables.

Kids feel good about doing something "grown-up." Give them small jobs to do. Praise their efforts.

Their smiles will light up your kitchen.

Kids love helping in the kitchen. Parents love knowing that their child is also learning skills they'll use for life. Help teach them to follow instructions, count, and more!

Prepare fruits and veggies together.

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Children learn about fruits and vegetables when they help make them. And all of that mixing, mashing, and measuring makes them want to taste what they are making. It's a great trick for helping your "picky eater" try fruits and vegetables.

On busy weeknights…

Cooking together can mean more "mommy and me" time on busy days. Ask your child to help with easy tasks, like adding veggie toppings to a cheese pizza.

Let your child choose which veggies to add to soup. Only an adult should heat and stir hot soup.

Make sandwiches together.

Make some meals special.

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Have a color contest and see how many green, red, yellow, and orange fruits and vegetables you can include in one meal.

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Name a food your child helps create. Make a big deal of serving "Karla's Salad" or "Corey's Sweet Potatoes" for dinner.

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Try a "Make Your Own" night. Let your family put together its own soft tacos, sandwiches, pizza, or salads. Place the ingredients within easy reach and let the fun begin.

Cooking Activities by Age

2-year-olds

Make "out of pieces of fruits and vegetables.

Scrub vegetables or fruits.

Tear lettuce or greens.

Snap green beans.

3-year-olds

Add ingredients.

Stir.

Spread peanut butter or other spreads.

Shake a drink in a sealed container.

Knead bread dough.

4- to 5-year-olds

Peel some fruits and vegetables like bananas.

Peel hard boiled eggs.

Cut soft fruits with a plastic knife.

Only adults should use sharp knives.

Wipe off counters.

Mash soft fruits, vegetables, and beans.

Measure dry ingredients.

Measure liquids with help.