

Healthy Eating: Fuel Up for Fun and Learning



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Summary: Healthy eating provides children with the energy and nutrients needed to grow, develop, and learn. When your child starts the day with a healthy breakfast he/she will be able to concentrate and perform better at school. Early childhood is an important time for children to learn to enjoy a variety of foods and to help them form lifelong health-promoting habits. Healthy food also fuels your child for active play which is a child's source of joy, self-expression, imagination and learning. When your child participates in regular physical activity, he/she will develop social skills and the ability to concentrate, memorize, create, problem solve and deal with emotions.

What is Healthy Eating?

Healthy eating provides children with the energy and nutrients needed to grow, develop, and learn. When your child starts the day with a healthy breakfast he/she will be able to concentrate and perform better at school.

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During the preschool years, growth slows causing a drop in appetite. At this age, children may be more interested in playing than eating. Children are born with the ability to know when they are hungry and when they are full.

Healthy eating involves decisions and choices by you and your child.

Adults decide...

- When to eat
- What to eat
- Where to eat

Children decide...

- Whether to eat
- How much to eat -- in other words, respect your child's appetite!

Tips to encourage active play

- Create an environment that supports physical activity: indoors and outside, e.g., space to dance or play at the playground.
- Take part in your child's activities. A child's self-esteem and skills improve when adults take part in their play.
- Dress your child in comfortable clothing that allows free movement, is appropriate for the weather, and that can get dirty.
- Praise and encourage your child on things he/she does well. This will help your child to feel good about himself/herself and about being active.
- Offer a wide variety of activities that are enjoyable and non-competitive.

Tips to encourage healthy eating

- Offer a variety of food from the four food groups of Canada's Food Guide (www.canadasfoodguide.org).
- Have available ready-to-eat snacks such as fresh fruit, yogurt, vegetables and dip, and low-sugar cereals with milk.
- Be patient. If your child doesn't eat certain foods, try again another time.
- Involve your child in food & meal preparation (eg. mix batter, tear lettuce, set table).
- Avoid using food as a reward or punishment.
- Meal time is a chance for you and your family to spend quality time together. Have a healthy family meal without TV or other distractions, but with cheerful conversation.
- Be a good role model. If you eat healthy your children are more likely to eat healthy as well. Conversely, if you do not eat healthy, understand that it will be much harder for your children to eat healthy!

About this Document

Written by the Eastern Ontario Health Unit, www.eohu.ca and members of the Best Start Network of Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry.

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