

Help Your Child Build a Healthy Eating Routine

Eating habits start early — so help your child build a healthy eating routine to last a lifetime.

Follow these tips to help kids and teens get the nutrition they need.



Offer your child a mix of healthy foods

There are lots of healthy choices in each food group! Help your child find a variety of foods they enjoy, including:



Whole fruits — like apples, berries, oranges, mangos, and bananas



Veggies — like broccoli, sweet potatoes, beets, okra, spinach, peppers, black beans, edamame, and jicama



Whole grains — like brown rice, millet, oatmeal, bulgur, whole-wheat bread, and pasta



Protein foods — like lean meats and chicken, eggs, seafood, beans and lentils, nuts and seeds, and tofu



Low-fat or fat-free dairy — like milk, yogurt, cheese, lactose-free dairy, and fortified soy beverages (soy milk) or soy yogurt



Oils — like vegetable oil, olive oil, and oils in foods like seafood, avocado, and nuts



Depending on your family's culture and tastes, your child might enjoy different foods than the ones listed here — and that's okay! You can find healthy foods that work for your family at [DietaryGuidelines.gov/sites/default/files/2020-12/DGA_2020-2025_CustomizingTheDietaryGuidelines.pdf](https://www.dietaryguidelines.gov/sites/default/files/2020-12/DGA_2020-2025_CustomizingTheDietaryGuidelines.pdf).

Avoid drinks with added sugars

Added sugars include sugars that are added to foods and drinks, foods packaged as sweeteners (like table sugar), and sugars from syrups and honey. Having drinks with added sugars — like soda and sports drinks — can make it hard for your child to get the nutrients they need without getting too many calories.

Follow these tips to avoid or limit drinks with added sugars:

- Offer **water** first — get your child a reusable water bottle to keep with them throughout the day
- Choose plain **low-fat (1%) or fat-free (skim) milk** instead of flavored milks with added sugars
- Keep **sparkling water** in the fridge instead of soda — add fruit or herbs for extra flavor

Be a role model

Younger kids love to imitate their parents — so when they see you enjoying healthy foods, they'll want to try them, too! Follow these tips to set a healthy example for your child:

- Model healthy habits — let your kids see you making healthy choices, like eating veggies and drinking water instead of soda
- Make mealtimes family time — eating healthy meals as a family can help your kids learn to enjoy healthy foods, too
- Cook meals together — schedule time with your kids to plan and make meals together throughout the week
- Celebrate your family food traditions — teach your kids about favorite healthy meals and foods from your culture



What about fruit juice?

Most of the time, **choose whole fruits** instead of juice. Whole fruits have fiber your child needs to stay healthy. If you do offer juice:

- Choose 100% fruit juice, which doesn't have any added sugars
- Give your child only a small serving (aim for 4 ounces or less)
- Try mixing 100% fruit juice with plain or sparkling water to reduce calories





Help your child build healthy habits

Getting children involved in their food choices can help get them excited about healthy eating. Try these tips:

- Keep healthy snacks handy — get ideas for healthy snacks at [MyPlate.gov/tip-sheet/healthy-snacking-MyPlate](https://www.myplate.gov/tip-sheet/healthy-snacking-MyPlate)
- Bring kids and teens along to the store — let them pick out new healthy foods to try together
- Build confidence in the kitchen — help your child learn basic skills like how to chop veggies, and try making kid-friendly recipes together
- Let kids pack their own lunch — help them make a simple sandwich on whole-wheat bread and choose a piece of fruit and a veggie to go with it
- Help your child eat healthy away from home — talk to them about how to make healthier choices when they're at a friend's house or school



What about picky eaters?

Picky eating is very common in young kids — so don't be discouraged! Over time, you can help your child explore a wider range of healthy foods. Try these tips:

- Offer each new food many times — kids may need up to 10 tries before they get used to it
- Try different prep methods — kids who don't like cooked veggies might love raw, crunchy veggies
- Make new foods easy to eat — try cutting up fruits and veggies into small, bite-sized pieces

Help your teen make healthy choices

As kids grow up, they'll probably want more control over their food choices. Many teens go for convenient foods that have a lot of calories but not enough nutrients. Use these tips to guide your teen toward healthier options:



Provide easy grab-and-go foods for busy teens — try keeping cut-up fruit and unsalted nuts on hand to grab as snacks



Get your teen a refillable water bottle — encourage them to drink water throughout the school day instead of sugary drinks



Talk about healthy options in restaurants — practice identifying healthier menu choices like whole grains and lean meats when you go out to eat together



Help your child build healthy bones

It's important for kids and teens to get enough calcium and vitamin D to build healthy bones. Dairy and fortified soy alternatives are a great way to get these important nutrients. Encourage your kids to try:

- Low-fat (1%) or fat-free (skim) milk and yogurt — or lactose-free versions
- Low-fat cheeses
- Unsweetened fortified soy beverages (soy milk) and soy yogurt with added calcium, vitamin A, and vitamin D





Make healthy eating work for your family

You can find ways to make healthy eating work with your family's schedule and budget. Try these tips:

- Buy fresh fruits and veggies in season to save on cost — and remember that frozen and canned fruits and veggies count, too
- Make family food prep a team effort — ask your child to help you chop lots of veggies or make a big batch of soup on the weekend to have handy during the week
- If you need help providing healthy food for your family, check out programs that provide food assistance at [USA.gov/Food-Help](https://www.usa.gov/food-help)

Remember, now's the time to start eating healthy

The food choices your family makes now can set your child up for a lifetime of healthy eating — so make every bite count!

- Learn about the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and get more resources to help your kids eat healthy at [DietaryGuidelines.gov](https://www.dietaryguidelines.gov)
- Find healthy eating tips and recipes for kids and teens at [MyPlate.gov](https://www.myplate.gov)



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