

Fit Facts™

FROM THE AMERICAN COUNCIL ON EXERCISE®

PARENTS, EAT YOUR WORDS!

Are you pleased with your progress toward healthful nutrition and fitness habits but frustrated with your children's? Do you suspect that the lunches you send to school are traded or thrown away? Do you shudder at the sight of your pantry shelves displaying high-fat snacks and sugary cereals that you vowed you would never buy? Can you really win the battle against advertising, peer pressure and kids' love affairs with sugar and fat?

THE BAD NEWS AND THE GOOD NEWS

Kids today are fatter and less fit than previous generations. Between the mid-1960s and the late 1970s, obesity increased 54 percent among young children (ages six to 11) and 39 percent among adolescents (ages 12 to 17). Recent studies show that obesity has continued to increase into the '90s.

Food companies spend millions of dollars on television advertising to convince children that high-fat, high-sugar, processed foods are worth eating. Food is consumed because it's cool, fun or comes with a free toy rather than for its impact on health or even for its taste!

So what's a parent to do? Eat your words! The fact is that parents who have adopted a lifestyle that includes healthful foods and regular exercise are living role models for their children. We know that the behaviors children see most often at home are the ones they will be most likely to adopt for themselves and parents' efforts to promote healthy food habits do make a difference.

The first step is to stop battling with your kids about food. You may need to slow the rate of change in your children's food choices and offer reasonable alternatives as you gradually reduce those high-fat, high-sugar foods. Be sure to include some of their favorite foods in daily meals.

STACK THE DECK

Family Goal Chart				
	Mom	Dad	Billy	Sally
Exercise				
M	★	★	★	★
T			★	★
W	★	★	★	★
T		★		★
F	★		★	
S	★	★	★	★
S				
Good Food				
M	★	★	★	★
T	★	★		
W	★	★	★	★
T			★	★
F	★			
S				
S				

Much of nutrition is common sense. For instance, stock the kitchen with a majority of healthy items, keeping in mind that kids want some of their favorite foods, which may be sweet and/or salty. Buy pretzels, which are low in fat, instead of greasy chips. Keep cut-up vegetables and ready-to-eat mini-carrots in the refrigerator. Sprinkle air-popped popcorn with grated parmesan cheese instead of butter.

A good way to get kids involved and committed to healthy eating habits is to involve them with the food shopping and preparation. There are lots of children's cookbooks on the market; select one that emphasizes ways to modify many favorite foods rather than eliminate them. Children who feel competent to select and prepare food will make more intelligent food choices.

BALANCE IS EVERYTHING

The key to keeping kids happy and healthy is to strike a balance between foods that are good for you and those that just taste good, between leisure or TV time and physical activity.

Which brings us to the other side of the healthy living equation. The most obvious impact of inactivity on kids is the strong association between the number of hours spent watching TV and the level of obesity among youngsters.

Make physical activity a family affair. Go for walks, fly kites, rollerblade around the neighborhood, play miniature golf or other sports. Anything that gets you moving together will no doubt be good for you, too.

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