



# Healthy Eating Strategies for Babies and Toddlers

Here are some ways to help your child become a healthy eater:

- 1. Remember: Meals are about more than food.** They are a time to connect with your child and support her overall development. Talk with your child during meals and don't let her eat alone. This helps build strong family relationships.
- 2. Create routines around mealtime.** Routines make children feel loved and secure. They also help children look forward to each meal. You might say a blessing if that's part of your family's tradition. Or, share something about your day before each meal.
- 3. Establish regular meal and snack times beginning when your child is 9-12 months old.** Give your child the words he needs to understand the connection between hunger and eating. When your child shows he is hungry, you might say: "You're hungry, aren't you? Well then, it's time to eat!" This helps children learn to link their feelings of hunger with the act of eating at regular times across the day.
- 4. Offer 3 to 4 healthy food choices at each meal.** Research shows that children will choose a healthy diet when they are offered a selection of healthy foods.
- 5. Don't force your baby or toddler to eat.** This often results in children refusing food and eating less.
- 6. Offer your child a healthy snack between meals if you think she is hungry.** This way if she doesn't eat much at one meal, she doesn't have to wait long to eat again.
- 7. Limit juice to no more than 4 ounces a day.** Juice has a lot of sugar. And drinking too much juice can fill children up and make them less hungry at mealtimes. Consider adding water to the juice. Offer fresh fruit instead of juice.
- 8. Be flexible about letting little ones get up from the table when they are done.** Babies and toddlers can't sit for long. Plan for three meals a day of about 10-20 minutes each and 2 to 3 snacks of about 5-15 minutes each.



- 9. Don't give up on new foods!** Patience is key. You may have to offer your child a new food 10 to 15 times before he will eat it. Encourage your child to touch the new food, lick, and taste it. Let him see you eat it. Children learn by watching and imitating you.
- 10. Turn off the TV (computers, and other screens) at mealtime.** Mealtime is a time to connect with your child. The television can distract children from eating. It also takes time away from talking as a family.
- 11. If you are concerned about your child's weight or activity level, talk to your child's health care provider.**

## Go Play!

Healthy eating and physical activity go hand-in-hand. So make movement a part of everyday family life. Take walks as a family, go to the playground, or dance inside to your favorite music. And limit television and computer time. Children who spend the most time in front of a screen are also the most likely to overeat and be overweight.

