



**Arkansas
Children's
Hospital**

Nutrition for Kids



Don't try to make all changes at once, pick one or two to try first. Then, when you and your child have mastered those, choose one or two more. Parents should make all the changes that you ask your children to make, regardless of your own weight status. Your children look to you for how to be as adults and will copy your behaviors.

- Visit www.mypyramid.gov for information on what your child should be eating, given their age, gender, and activity level.
- Increase fruit and vegetables to at least 5 per day. More is even better.
- Have fewer trans fats and saturated fats in favor of mono-unsaturated fats (peanut butter, olive oil, canola oil, nuts) which actually improve cholesterol. Do not add butter, margarine, or other oils in cooking if at all possible. Bake/broil instead of frying. Read and understand food labels regarding fat content.
- For each meal, divide a small size plate in half. 1/2 = fruits/veggies 1/4 = carbohydrates 1/4 = protein. Having proteins and carbs in every meal is tastier, more satisfying, more nutritious, and keeps the digestive system and metabolism going.
- Snack foods should be fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and low fat dairy products.
- Decrease the amount of sugar in your diet. Start eating less refined sugars. Keep fruit juice to 1 cup (8 oz) per day. Drink water, low fat milk, or sugar-free drinks instead of colas, juices, and sweetened tea. Eat unsweetened cereal. Use sugar substitutes. Limit sweets and desserts.
- Write down everything you and your child eat – monitoring food intake alone often can improve intake quality and diminish quantity.
- Turn the TV off while eating; it keeps you from noticing how much you are eating.
- Eat all meals and snacks in the same place in the house and at scheduled times. Do not watch TV, read, or do homework while eating.
- Drink a lot of water throughout the day.
- Serve a variety of healthy foods. The more flavors, smells, and textures they experience, the wider the variety they will accept. Do not force them to eat it but strongly encourage tasting/touching/smelling the new foods. Present a food to the child repeatedly (anywhere from 7 to 15 times) as children often need repeated tries before they decide if they like or dislike a food.
- Take small bites, chew slowly, swallow, and pause between bites. This gives your stomach a chance to let your brain know when it is full.
- Keep healthy and nutritious choices at home. Remove less healthy foods from the house (candy, chips, soft drinks, etc.).
- Have all family members make nutrition changes together – show your child how to eat more nutritiously by doing so yourself. Remember, kids tend to like (and eat) what you like.
- Do not use food as rewards. Toys or activities or simply fun time with parents can be just as motivating.

- Develop new holiday habits that are not food related and create holiday food favorites that are healthy foods. Develop new holiday activity habits, too, such as a family bike ride after Thanksgiving dinner rather than hours and hours of sedentary TV viewing.
- Decrease eating “empty” calories – foods with no nutritious value (colas, cakes, candy, chocolate drinks, sweet tea, etc.). But do not ban these sweets totally – make them rare and unusual not everyday items.
- Replace low quality carbs (refined flour, juices, portion sizes, sweets) with high quality carbs (high fiber, whole grains).
- Focus on slow and steady calorie reduction not slicing calories too strongly, too quickly. Let your child’s body and mind adjust to the new intake levels. You and they will be more likely to stick with it.
- Don’t skip meals, it will decrease metabolism. Have several small meals and snacks through the day, including a good balanced breakfast and your metabolism will increase.
- Consciously plan the upcoming weeks worth of snacks and meals before grocery shopping, you or your child will have what you need on hand and be less likely to impulsively eat non-nutritious food. Plan the time of meals and snacks. Keep to it!
- Eat when you are hungry, and stop when you are barely full. Encourage your child to do the same. Ask if they are hungry before they eat and during the meal, to get them thinking about those cues that tell you to stop. Do not have a “clean your plate” policy in your home.
- If your child feels hungry and it is not a planned meal or snack time, have them drink some water. Often when we feel hungry we are really thirsty.
- If you are still hungry after a brief waiting period, have a small portion of seconds but only of meat, salad, or non-starchy fruits and vegetables.
- Eat only recommended serving sizes for all food (see sheet of common serving sizes). Do not super size your meals.
- Do not cater to a child’s favorite foods or whims – take charge of mealtime choices. Within reason, have all members of the family eat the same things – healthy choices presented to all.
- Avoid dieting for you or your child – weight-loss pills, potions, herbs, unsafe eating practices. Never say “diet” but instead focus on a permanent lifestyle change – a healthy lifestyle change.
- Discuss healthy food in a positive way with your child. Let them help you pick out fruit/vegetables in the store and talk about how each helps the body in different ways. Get educated so you can answer their questions.
- Prepare your child for meals away from home – limited choices, pressure from peers or relatives, etc. Discuss options that would be healthy.
- Ask a nutritionist or read up on the latest “healthy” offerings from fast food restaurants. Some are not much better than the high-calorie, high-fat versions so be careful. When you do eat out, ask for a fruit or vegetable to be served rather than snacking on breadsticks or crackers. If the children’s menu has nothing healthy, ask whether the chef can make a half portion of an adult entrée or dine family-style – sharing the adult foods. Don’t forget adult portion sizes – adults may want to order child portions or half portions, or split with a child. Keep drinks a normal size and opt for low-fat milk or water. Split kids meals in half if portions are too large for your child. Take half home or split between two children. If they do not offer fruit for dessert, go home and have some there!
- Seek the professional advice of a nutritionist, behavioral change therapist, and/or specialty medical provider for all members of the family who are overweight, sedentary, or eating in unhealthy ways. We need to treat the family not just one individual.

For more information regarding these handouts contact:

Wendy L. Ward-Begnoche, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor
UAMS College of Medicine
Department of Pediatrics
800 Marshall Street, Slot 512-21
501-364-1021

For treatment in a multidisciplinary medical clinic for overweight youth:

ACH Fitness Clinic
For appointments call
501-364-8957