

Kids and Obesity: Food Choices Matter



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By now you've surely heard of the [childhood obesity](#) [12] epidemic sweeping America. But here are some sobering facts you may not know.

Childhood obesity has more than tripled in the past 30 years. More than a third of children and adolescents in our country are now [overweight or obese](#) [13].

It's an urgent crisis with immediate and long-term health consequences for our children. Obese youths are more likely to have pre-diabetes and risk factors for [cardiovascular disease](#) [14]. Overweight children also tend to be overweight adults and are at increased risk for [heart disease](#) [15], [stroke](#) [16], [cancer](#) [17], [diabetes](#) [18] and [osteoarthritis](#) [19].

 *A healthy diet includes adding vegetables and fruit every day. Vegetables like broccoli, green beans, leafy greens, zucchini, cauliflower, cabbage, carrots, and tomatoes are low in calories and high in fiber, vitamins, and minerals. Many studies have shown that eating plenty of vegetables is extremely healthy. Try to eat about 3 to 5 servings every day. Fruit is also a good source of fiber, vitamins, and minerals. You should try to eat about 2 to 3 servings of fruit each day.*

Help your kids make healthy choices.

Face it: kids love fast food. Hey, who doesn't? But as a parent, you have the power to steer your children's dining choices toward more [nutritious](#) [20], less fattening foods. Which means an oasis of healthfulness and wellbeing can bloom for your kids, even in the most barren food desert.

Here are some simple strategies to help you help your kids eat the apple slices instead of fries and live better, longer, healthier lives.

Orchestrate their orders. Set a good example by ordering wisely before your kids do. Take control by reading through the menu and suggesting choices for your kids. Arm them with information and motivate them, but never dictate to them.

Put your foot down. When your kids vehemently reject the wise and nutritious food choices you lovingly suggest, threaten them with the loss of a desired activity like playing videogames. And mean it.

Bribe them. Offer them cash incentives to eat better. Sure beats fighting with them every time you go out to eat.

Have them order off the adult menu. Yes, it's more expensive and the portions may be too plentiful, but the options for adults are often more nutritious. You can always have them split an order or take home the extra.

No toy for you! Tell your kids they can't get the toy that comes with the kid's meal unless they order a healthy meal. Works every time.

Opt for a sit-down restaurant. They tend to offer healthier options and smaller portions than burger joints. Do your homework. Look up nutrition information online for your top three fast food spots. The more you know up front, the better the choices you can make.

Snack strategically. Offer fruit or low-fat cheese sticks as you're about to head out the door, so your kids won't gorge at the restaurant.

Can the juice. It lacks fiber and is high in calories. Whole fruit is always a better choice.

Get produce on their plates. Make produce, not French fries, the side dish of choice with burgers, sandwiches, even pizza. Kids need the fiber, the antioxidants, the vitamins and minerals.

Nudge them toward lean main dishes. Try subtracting the sauce, cheese and bacon from that megaburger. Point your kids toward grilled, not crispy or fried. Turn lighter appetizers and soups into entrees.

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