

## Maintaining Children's Weight By Teaching Simple Eating Habits

Childhood obesity continues to rise, with the World Health Organization defining it as “one of the [most serious public health challenges](#) of the 21st century.”

When children are overweight, they become more vulnerable to serious medical problems such as diabetes, hypertension, cardiovascular disease and depression due to low self-esteem as well as social and emotional stress.

As such, parents must **Champion healthy eating and active lifestyles** in the family to protect their little ones from these lifelong health risks. [Nutrition advisors](#) warn that without effective prevention and intervention strategies, overweight children are highly at risk for becoming obese adults later in life.

For your kids to hit their [height and weight growth](#) milestones, they need to **consume the right amount of vitamins, minerals and nutrients** they need for their age. The emphasis is on the term “right amount”— too little or too much of these key nutrients can hinder your little one's brain and body development.

However, the stresses of daily living, your child's changing needs and other factors can make this task more challenging than it should be. So how do you make sure your child follows a varied and well-balanced diet for them to thrive and grow? It all starts with cultivating healthy habits that they will stick with for life.

### Teaching healthy eating habits

To teach your kids good eating habits, you need to look beyond the contents of her plate and see the bigger picture: your family routines, the goals you establish as a parent, your habits, values and behavior toward food, and so on.

- **Build a strong nutritional foundation from birth.** Exclusive breastfeeding from birth up to six months is recommended. If you're doing mixed feeding or formula feeding, stay away from milk products with added sugars and fillers. Choose only a pediatrician-trusted milk that's formulated to suit your baby's needs.
- **Plant a love for veggies early on.** Your baby's first foods should be whole, fresh, simply prepared food. For example, steamed vegetables, natural fruit puree, homemade meat broth and unflavored yoghurts are tasty, affordable and easy to prepare. They're all packed with the vitamins, minerals and nutrients baby needs for optimal brain and body growth. Moreover, natural foods offer a variety of flavors and textures that help your child become a varied eater as time goes by.
- **Make healthy options the star of your meals.** Build your daily meals around nutrient-rich ingredients. Instead of preparing vegetables as a “side salad,” why not make your main entrée a vegetable stir fry or a veggie pasta instead? Instead of adding a few fruits as a dessert topping, why not go for the whole fruit instead to end the meal? Making those tweaks conveys the message to your kids that healthy should be the main and default option.
- **Serve nutrient-rich, energy-boosting breakfasts.** Prepare healthy breakfasts every day and encourage your children to eat every morning. A regular breakfast habit will especially come handy when your child reaches school age, because a filling breakfast reduces cravings throughout the day and thus prevents overeating. Plus, studies suggest students who eat a healthy breakfast before each school day perform better academically than those who skip the first meal of the day.
- **Snack wisely.** Your children may be eating healthy meals, but are sugary and junk snacks sabotaging their diet? Snacks are a great opportunity to teach your kids that healthy can be yummy, too. Popcorn, fruit kabobs, crunchy veggie dips, healthy burgers, baked vegetable crisps, homemade granola, tacos (with lots of crunchy vegetables), cheese bites, and smoothies are all good to eat and great for growing bodies and minds.
- **Drink responsibly.** Another serious healthy diet saboteur among kids today are fancy drinks loaded with sugar and empty calories. Many parents now choose to simply restrict soft drinks and other drinks with artificial sweeteners. Make sure your kid drinks lots of water throughout the day. Natural fruit juice and coconut water are also great thirst busters. The right beverages can also be clever nutrition boosters; milkshakes, smoothies and creamy drinks made even creamier with fortified milk contain calcium, vitamin D and macronutrients that active, fast-growing children need.

### Eating well is just one part of the equation

Obesity is caused by various, complicated factors, some of which you may not be able to control (such as genetics, environment or medical history). Focus on the factors you do have the capacity to control. For instance, aside from poor eating habits, obesity can also be caused by sedentary lifestyles. So **limit screen time and let your children enjoy free play and active fun**, preferably outdoors.

Lastly, and perhaps more importantly, **model the behavior you want to see.** Want to raise healthy eaters? Be a healthy eater yourself. Display positive attitudes on eating, enjoy good food and commit to an active lifestyle. Take care of yourself by making your own health a priority. The vibrant life you will live will be something your children will want to have, too.