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# 8 HEALTHY HABITS FOR KIDS

Nutrition expert **Ashleigh Feltham** shares eight healthy habits for the little people.

**E**ating well at any age is important, but it's extremely important during the younger years because this is the phase when life-long habits are created, which can influence both long and short-term health. Of course, eating well is also important for your child, as it ensures they can perform at school and in life.

Remember also that children grow in spurts, which means when looking at any one class at school, there will most likely be a range of different heights, all of which are healthy.

As mentioned in other articles in this edition, as a parent you play a critical role in helping your children develop positive food and lifestyle habits, because you have influence over the way food is prepared and cooked, what food is available in the house, and where and how meals are eaten. We've also already explained the health benefits for families who eat together at mealtimes, and we've explained that your kids are unlikely to follow any strategies if they see you doing something completely different; so always remember that you need to lead by example if you want a habit to catch on!

So here are eight healthy habits that as a parent and family unit, you can create, which can serve your health well over the long-term.

- 1 Choose foods that will give your child the energy they need for growth and development without the excess sugar, fat and salt. Try having plenty of fruit, as well as low fat cheese, yoghurt or milk readily available. Stock the pantry with healthy options like baked beans, tins of tuna and wholegrain or multigrain bread and crackers.
- 2 If your kids crave cereal, try wholegrain and high fibre types like Weetabix, oats, muesli, Vita Brits, All Bran, Mini Wheats, and Shredded Wheat. If these are not sweet enough, try adding some finely sliced whole fruit like a banana or peaches. Your tastebuds will adapt over time so when you stop having high sugary cereals all the time, you'll soon stop craving them.

- 3 Set regular meal times. If both breakfast and dinner are impossible with your lifestyle then aim for at least one consistently timed meal, and commit to another on the weekend. Weekends are also a great time to have lunch together – try a picnic at your local park, lake or beach.
- 4 Limit the 'sometimes foods' to once or twice a week at the most. Foods are meant to be enjoyed and we should never feel deprived, but there is also a line that needs to be drawn as a parent. Make special treats something to celebrate, rather than an everyday expectation.
- 5 When selecting meats to have at home, select those with lower saturated fat like fish or chicken breast. If you do have meat containing more fat, try to cut it out (e.g. the skin on the chicken).
- 6 The type of breads and cereal products you choose can influence the amount of nutrients you consume. Try choosing multigrain or wholemeal breads over white; and opt for brown pasta and rice over the white varieties. Experiment with other grains like couscous and quinoa.
- 7 Nuts and seeds are a super snack but be mindful of portion sizes and added salt. Try separating a handful of nuts and seeds into small bags, and pack them for recess time at school, or keep them on hand for whenever you're hungry.
- 8 Remember that drinking your calories counts too! So offer water as the main drink, or mineral water over juice. Juice can contain all the energy (sugar) but without the fibre and without much of the nutrients whole fruit provides. If you are going to allow juice in the house, aim for a 'no added sugar' variety and a limit intake to half a cup a day.

Setting up healthy habits for your child also extends to regular exercise. And when you lead by example, it means you're also helping to enhance your own health as well as your family's. Making small changes, rather than completely redoing your lifestyle and food environment is a great way to help enhance the long-term health of your family. **Y**

