

YOUR SIMPLE PLAN TO GET YOUR KIDS TO EAT HEALTHFULLY.

**BONUS: THE BEST PACKED LUNCH EVER!** BY EMILIE DINGFELD

# A Practical Guide to a Healthy Life

With childhood obesity at an all-time high – four times greater than it was 40 years ago – now is a better time than ever to get your kids to eat healthy foods. Overweight children are at risk for a host of health problems, including cardiovascular disease later in life. Start them on healthy habits now and they'll thank you later. It may take more than talking about broccoli trees and Popeye arms, but relax; you can become stronger and healthier as a family by following these simple tips.

## Commit to regular family dinners

Sitting down to family dinners with your children, and turning off the TV while you're at it, is one of the best things you can do for their health – and yours. Studies show that sitting down to family dinners leads to healthier meals and healthier food choices in the long term.

Missy Chase Lapine, author of *The Sneaky Chef* cookbook series, recommends taking the time during family meals to tune in to your hunger signals and teach your kids to do the same. "I don't like kids eating mindlessly in front of the TV or computer – we should teach our children. When we're eating, we should

INSTILL HEALTHY HABITS IN YOUR CHILDREN NOW SO THEY CAN REAP LIFELONG HEALTH BENEFITS.

## TIP:

Add some nutrition to your desserts by using natural sweeteners, such as applesauce, agave nectar, and whole wheat and whole-grain flours.

## Clean Up Your Fave Meals

- **No more grease-stained pizza boxes!** Try English-muffin pizzas instead. Top a whole-grain English muffin (or try a whole wheat pita) with low-sodium tomato sauce, veggies and even add a few strips of chicken breast. Sprinkle on some low-fat cheese and broil.
- **Are your kids in love with burgers and fries?** That's OK – but make your own instead of hitting the drive-through at McDonald's. Serve them on whole wheat buns with baked sweet potato fries or veggies.
- **Instead of sugary juices and sodas,** give your kids whole fruits to eat. Try mixing 100 percent fruit juice with low-sodium sparkling water for a treat.
- **Cookie monsters:** Ditch the boxed, bagged junk and bake your own healthy cookies. Substitute heart-healthy oils and fruits for butter. Kids deserve treats – at least your cookies won't be loaded with preservatives!
- **Fruit snack attack:** Buy various dried fruits and make your own mixture. Your kids will get natural sugars and fiber. Mix it up with dried blueberries, cherries, apples and bananas.

For more simple food swaps, check out *Oxygen's Pick it Kick it*, [pickitkickit.com](http://pickitkickit.com)



LEAD PHOTO: YVONNE DUIVENVOORDEN

Tell us what you think!  
Got a recipe to share?  
[oxygenmag.com/offthecouch](http://oxygenmag.com/offthecouch)



## Make it easier

- Keep frozen veggies on hand to add fast nutrition to any meal.
- Make a batch of burgers (try extra-lean ground beef, turkey or chicken) and freeze the rest with waxed paper between them.
- Make healthy muffins and freeze some for quick breakfasts and snacks.
- Make a double batch of healthy cookie dough, roll the unused portion into a log and freeze it.
- Chop up a bunch of fruits and veggies and put them into individual containers right away for quick snacks.
- Make extra pasta, rice or grains – just reheat to save on the cooking time.

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## KEEP THEM ACTIVE

"Children should be getting at least 60 minutes of physical activity a day," Ruth Frechman says. "Parents should be promoting physical activity." Find ways to stay active every day, whether you take a walk, bike ride or play a game of soccer with your kids. Missy Chase Lapine suggests finding ways to "sneak" in physical activity. She keeps a mini trampoline in front of the TV, and finds that her kids jump their way through *American Idol*. "Small changes, big benefits," Lapine says.

try to take away the other distractions," she says. Start small: If you only eat together as a family once a week, increase it to two times. Make it your goal to add in some family meals each week.

### Give your pantry a makeover

It's simple: Get rid of junk and rid yourself of temptation. "Not having unhealthy food around is really helpful," says Ruth Frechman, RD, spokesperson for the American Dietetic Association. Replace all the bad stuff – high-fat cheese, chips, soda, white breads and pastas – with healthier options like low-fat cheese,

whole-grain crackers, fruits, veggies, brown rice and whole-grain pastas. Keep cut up fruits and veggies and healthy dips in the fridge for easy snacking. "I keep cans of white beans around and I just drain them and blend them up to make what looks like a mild hummus – it takes literally less than two minutes," Lapine says. Air-popped popcorn and toasted whole wheat pita chips and salsa make great snacks too.

### Be a good role model

"Your kids pick up on your habits, so if you want them to eat healthfully, you need to do that yourself," Frechman says. "This should start from

day one. For me, the parents are the most important role models, so whatever they feed themselves, they should be setting the example." Try to eat the same meal as your kids. "As long as you're preparing healthy food, then there's no need to make different meals."

### Be their number-one teacher

You should start teaching your kids about food and nutrition from day one, Frechman says. "Between the ages of two and three, kids are starting to develop their tastes and preferences." Take your kids to the grocery store and let them choose

## PB & J All Cleaned Up

Ready in 2 minutes • Makes 1 serving

- 2 slices Ezekiel, rye or any hearty whole-grain bread
- 2 tbsp natural nut butter or nut-free spread
- 4 or 5 fresh strawberries, hulled and sliced

1. Toast the bread and spread with nut butter.
2. Place sliced strawberries on top of nut butter so it is completely covered with berries.
3. Place the second piece of toast on top. Cut in half and serve.

(Recipe courtesy of *The Eat-Clean Diet for Family and Kids* book.)



Nut-free school? Try SunButter (a nut-free spread).

**Nutrients per serving:**  
Calories: 386, Total Fats: 20 g, Saturated Fat: 2 g, Trans Fat: 0 g, Cholesterol: 0 mg, Sodium: 155 mg, Total Carbohydrates: 43 g, Dietary Fiber: 9 g, Sugars: 0 g, Protein: 14 g, Iron: 5 mg

the vegetables they want to eat. Teach your kids over time to identify their favorite vegetables and the different food categories: Dairy, fruits and vegetables, grains, fats and proteins – they'll begin to take pride in their knowledge.

### Ditch old-school rules

Remember how much you hated it when your parents forced you to eat those soggy peas? When it comes to whether or not you should

force your child to finish what's on the plate, Frechman says: "Never." By doing that, she says, you take away your child's control over his or her hunger cues. "How can they decide when to stop if

*Be patient with your kids: They may need to try something 10 times (or more) before they will be willing to eat it.*

somebody is telling them to keep eating?" Forcing kids to eat their most despised foods doesn't work either; it only

causes tension and stress at the dinner table. Children may need to try something 10 times (or more) before they will be willing to eat it. Lastly, never use food as a reward or a comfort, Frechman says. Good behavior can be rewarded with a trip to the movies, or a day at the beach.

### Make a lunch your kids want to eat

Tired of getting back half-eaten lunches at the end of the school day? Switch up the lunches you pack based on what your kids like to eat. Let them choose which veggie and fruit they want to bring to school, and ask them if they prefer PB sandwiches or crackers and cheese, or even leftovers from the night before. It could be that your children hate sandwiches but will eat wraps or "deconstructed" sandwiches (crackers, cheese, slices of meat). Maybe they

### Keep it fun

Kids love playing, so while you may not want them building scenic landscapes with their mashed potatoes and broccoli, there are ways to keep it fun. "Have an orange day where you have oranges for breakfast, carrots for lunch and some kind of squash for dinner," Frechman says. The next day could be red day. You can even try planting a garden together.

### Ditch the sugary breakfast cereals

Feed your kids the breakfast they deserve – no more sugar-laden cereals. They need a balanced breakfast, whether that is scrambled eggs and whole-grain toast or oatmeal topped with fruit (Check out two great ways to use steel-cut oats on page 25). You can also try smoothies, in which you can easily slip some powerhouse ingredients. Lapine adds

avocado to her daughter's morning smoothie. "It's richer and keeps her fuller a little longer."



**TIP:**  
Get fit as a family! Keep your kids active by taking them for a walk in the park.

MOTHER AND CHILD PHOTO 123RF SANDWICH PHOTO DONNA GRIFFITH BENTO BOX PAULI BUCETA

## BENTO BOX IT!

Let ziplocks and brown paper bags be a thing of the past: This Japanese-inspired lunch box adds variety to your kid's lunch, while keeping portions in check.

TRY COMBINING SOME OF THESE:

- Air-popped popcorn
- Fruit salad
- Home-made trail mix
- Veggies and low-fat dip
- Half a sandwich or wrap
- Salad
- Mini whole-grain baked goods
- Crackers and cheese
- "Undone" sandwiches: meat, low-fat cheese slices, veggies and crackers

ALTERNATE BETWEEN SLICED AND WHOLE FRUITS.

PACK A NUTRITIONAL PUNCH WITH MILK INSTEAD OF JUICE.



USE COOKIE CUTTERS TO TRANSFORM VEGGIES AND SANDWICHES INTO FUN SHAPES.

VARY THE BREADS: ALTERNATE BETWEEN WRAPS, BUNS, CRACKERS, PITA BREAD AND ENGLISH MUFFINS.

\* Lunch Box \$25; goodbyn.com



### OTHER FUN FOOD IDEAS:

- Include a non-food treat, such as a fun school supply or a note from you.
- Yesterday's hot pasta dinner equals a fun cold pasta salad the day after – double up when cooking.
- Make kabobs with fruit, veggies and cheese.
- Make yogurt sundaes: Pack toppings such as dark chocolate chips, fresh and dried fruits.