

## Healthy Nutrition in our Children

Nutrition has an enormous influence on a child's growth, immune system, and body and brain development. Children, however, are frequently food critics and can be picky eaters. Here are a few tips for maintaining simple yet healthy eating habits for your children.

1. Offer your children fresh foods. Buy most of your foods from the periphery of the grocery store such as the produce and dairy sections. Foods in the middle of the store tend to contain many processed foods that contain large amounts of unhealthy sugar, salts, harmful fats, artificial ingredients and preservatives.
2. Make homemade baby food. You can make countless combinations of pureed food in the comfort of your home. For example, mix pears, apples and spinach or baked sweet potatoes and carrots. Remember to introduce only one new ingredient at a time. You can also access the CDC website for additional information regarding infant and toddler nutrition:  
<https://www.cdc.gov/nutrition/InfantandToddlerNutrition/index.html>
3. Offer your children water instead of juice. Juices and soda have lots of sugar and can quickly lead to your child being overweight. If you do not have sugary drinks in the house, your child will not drink them. These beverages are empty calories. If your child likes a sweetened drink, squeeze a fresh orange or lemon into their water.
4. Our brains are mostly made of fat. Offer your children healthy fats such as nuts, avocado, and fish for healthy brain development. Saturated fats such as fried foods, margarine, and processed snack foods (cookies, crackers) can lead to inflammation in the body and can increase your child's risks for diabetes and cardiovascular diseases.
5. Try to avoid sweet cereals with lots of coloring. They have lots of artificial additives and lots of sugar and should be consumed minimally.
6. Yogurts are great sources of protein. Be careful of some yogurts marketed for children as they may contain a lot of unnecessary added sugar. Buy plain yogurt and mix in fresh fruits and nuts instead. This makes for a yummy snack or dessert.
7. Not all calories are created equal. A hundred calories from almonds are very healthy. Almonds contain fibers and healthy fats. A hundred calories from candy, however, mostly come from sugar. This is without any nutritional value; those are empty calories!
8. Most importantly, remember the importance of cooking and eating food together as a family. Turn off distractions like the TV, computer, tablets and phones during mealtime. Eating together provides a time to be connected. This helps children feel loved and safe, and studies show children of families who eat together also perform better in school!