Nutritionists often say it’s not so much what you eat, but how much you eat that counts. Get your child used to eating right-sized portions now, and you’ll be doing her a lifelong favor. Try these ideas.

**Plate perceptions**

The amount of food on a plate—whether it’s really one serving or three—is the amount your youngster will think is a normal serving. Pay attention to serving sizes on packages, and become familiar with healthy portion sizes for meats and other foods that aren’t marked (look online for guidance). Then, serve plates with those portions. Over time, your child will learn to take that amount when she serves herself.

**Packaging decisions**

People tend to pour more from large boxes or jars than from smaller ones. You could still buy in bulk to save money, but repackage cereal or nuts into smaller containers when you get home. Likewise, put snacks into little bowls—or directly onto your youngster’s plate—rather than placing a box of pretzels or a bag of deli meat on the table.

**Mini treats**

Healthy eating doesn’t have to mean an end to sweets. Let your child enjoy treats in small doses, and she’ll get to satisfy her sweet tooth without all the calories. Cut brownies into bite-size pieces. Put a few spoonfuls of ice cream into a cup. When you bake, make mini-muffins rather than full-size ones, or drop cookie dough from a teaspoon rather than a tablespoon. Then, have one or two, and freeze the rest for another time.

**Make TV less important**

Often, watching TV is just the easiest thing for a youngster to do. Keep TV from being your child’s first choice with these ideas:

- Does he have a TV in his bedroom? Move it out, and encourage him to do other things with his free time (play outside, read).
- If you have several televisions, consider donating one so there aren’t as many rooms with sets.
- Put a basket of “TV alternatives” (art supplies, games, books) by the set. Post a sign on the TV with an arrow pointing to the basket and the words, “Try these instead!”

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Food allergies

If you have a child with food allergies, you may wonder about the best way to handle school situations. This advice will help.

Have a plan. Get your youngster involved from the start in managing his allergies. Together, write down a plan. Be specific about the foods he can't eat, and list symptoms to help him recognize that he's having a reaction (hives, swelling, nausea, dizziness, trouble breathing).

Tell school officials. Notify the office staff, his teachers, the school nurse, and the cafeteria manager about your child's allergies. Provide them with your emergency contact information.

Discuss school meals. Read the menu with your youngster, and talk about what he plans to eat each day. Together, highlight items he should not have.

Practice situations. Go over what to do if a reaction begins. He should ask a teacher or staff member for help—or tell a friend right away to get help. Also, role-play how he should respond if a classmate wants to trade food. (“Thanks anyway, but I have allergies, so I have to eat my own food.”)

Q & A

Q: Nagging my kids about eating healthier hasn't seemed to make much difference. Are there fun ways for them to learn about nutrition instead?

A: Definitely! Try setting up a play grocery store (a big cardboard box will work just fine). Stock it with empty packages of nutritious foods, such as brown rice, almonds, fat-free milk, and whole-grain cereal, and add plastic fruits and vegetables. Then, take turns being the cashier and the customer, and talk about the yummy foods you’re ordering or ringing up.

Another idea is to read picture or chapter books about farmers and gardening, as well as children’s nonfiction books about where our food comes from. You could ask the librarian for titles.

Also, check at your library or community center for children’s or parent-child cooking classes. Getting into the kitchen is a truly fun way to learn about making good food choices!

Q: How can I manage my child’s food allergies?

A: Have a plan. Be specific about the foods he can’t eat, and list symptoms to help him recognize that he’s having a reaction. Tell school officials. Notify the office staff, his teachers, the school nurse, and the cafeteria manager about your child’s allergies.

Practice situations. Go over what to do if a reaction begins. He should ask a teacher or staff member for help—or tell a friend right away to get help. Also, role-play how he should respond if a classmate wants to trade food. (“Thanks anyway, but I have allergies, so I have to eat my own food.”)

Nutrition Nuggets™ is reviewed by a registered dietitian. Consult a physician before making any major change in diet or exercise.

OUR PURPOSE

To provide busy parents with practical ways to promote healthy nutrition and physical activity for their children.

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Healthier holidays

The November and December holidays can bring lots of joy, but also lots of calories and extra pounds. Make your holiday meals a little healthier with these tips.

1. When using canned chicken broth or beef broth for gravy or stuffing, first freeze the can for 1–2 hours.

2. Use fat-free evaporated milk rather than cream in casseroles.

3. Add flavor with herbs and spices instead of salt. Season potatoes with garlic and rosemary, or add a pinch of cayenne pepper to macaroni and cheese.

4. Skip the canned cranberry sauce with its added sugar and sodium. Instead, puree cranberries (fresh or frozen) in orange juice and water.