

Food & Mood: Information for Parents

Food & Your Mood

Good nutrition is important for our growth and development, including our mental health. The food we eat can affect our brain chemicals, (serotonin, dopamine, etc.). These brain chemicals affect the way we think, feel and act. Healthy eating can help children:

- Feel better about themselves, their bodies, and their abilities
- Cope with stress and manage their emotions better
- Do better in school
- Sleep better

It is important to help children develop healthy relationships with food and to decrease any possible food related stress. This can greatly benefit their future health and well-being. kelymentalhealth.ca

Healthy Eating Start at Home

Healthy habits start to develop early. Through positive interactions and positive, deliberate learning opportunities, children in healthy families develop the routines that enable them to develop in healthy ways.

As a parent or caregiver, your job is to provide your child with healthy choices at meal and snack times. It's then up to your child to decide what, how much and (sometimes) whether they will eat. Listening to their bodies—eating when they are hungry and stopping when they are full—will help children develop healthy eating habits for life. kidshealth.org

What is Healthy Eating?

Every child needs a balanced diet with foods from all 4 food groups—vegetables and fruit, grain products, milk and alternatives, and meat and alternatives. Canada's Food Guide gives information about the amount and type of food recommended for your child.

www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/canada-food-guides.html

Though kids may ask their parents for less nutritious foods, adults should be in charge when deciding which foods are regularly stocked in the house. If their favorite snack isn't all that nutritious, you can still buy it once in a while as a "sometimes" food. kidshealth.org

Dieting & Unhealthy Eating Habits

Teens are still growing and need the right amount of nutrients to be healthy. However, many teens will turn to dieting as a way to feel better about their bodies. Unfortunately, it usually doesn't work.

Studies show that youth who diet gain more weight than their non-dieting peers. Dieting has also been found to lead to poor body image and decreased self-esteem, regardless of whether at or above a healthy weight. It has also been shown to increase the chance of a child or youth developing an eating disorder. kelymentalhealth.ca

- About 1 in every 2 teenage girls and 1 in every 4 teenage boys have tried dieting to change the shape of their bodies.
- More than 1 in 3 girls who are at a healthy weight still try to diet. www.caringforkids.cps.ca

Strategies to Support Healthy Eating Habits for Kids

Establish a predictable schedule of meals and snacks. The regular family meal habit is a strong predictor of good achievement in school and fewer behavioural problems. Research suggests that eating regularly as a family may decrease the risk of weight problems, substance use, depressive symptoms, eating disorders, suicide, and early sexual intercourse. kelymentalhealth.ca

Be a role model and eat healthy yourself. When teaching good eating habits, try to set the best example possible. Choose nutritious snacks, eat at the table, and don't skip meals.

Let kids stop eating when they feel they've had enough. Quit the "clean-plate club." This approach doesn't help kids listen to their own bodies when they feel full. When kids notice and respond to feelings of fullness, they're less likely to overeat. Talk about your feelings of fullness, especially with younger children. You might say, "This is delicious, but I'm full, so I'm going to stop eating."

Try to stay neutral about foods. Don't label food by telling your child that chocolate bars are "bad" and apples are "good." Parents who are always dieting or complaining about their bodies may foster these same negative feelings in their kids. It's more important to talk about "everyday foods" like vegetables and fruit, whole grain cereals and breads, and "sometimes" foods—like chips and candy—that are eaten as special treats once in a while. Occasional sweets are fine, but don't turn dessert into the main reason for eating dinner. When dessert is the prize for eating dinner, kids naturally place more value on the cupcake than the broccoli.



Don't use food as a reward. Using treats when kids are sad, or as a reward for good behaviour causes children to associate food with emotions. This link can last through life. So later, when they are sad or anxious or even happy, they'll want to eat. Try to find other ways to soothe or reward children that don't involve food.

Food is not love. Find better ways to say "I love you." When foods are used to reward kids and show affection, they may start using food to cope with stress or other emotions. Offer hugs, praise, and attention instead of food treats.

kidshealth.org

Resources for Healthy Eating

www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/canada-food-guides.html
www.caringforkids.cps.ca/handouts/dieting_information_for_parents
www.cps.ca/
<http://kelymentalhealth.ca/healthy-eating-quiz>
<http://kidshealth.org/en/parents/habits.html?WT.ac=p-ra#>
<http://kidshealth.org/en/parents/eating-tips.html?WT.ac=p-ra#cathealthy-eating>