

Improving Your Child's Nutrition

Mealtime Strategies Beyond More Fruits & Vegetables

BY LINDSEY CARTER, MS, RDN



Most families know increased fruits and vegetables and decreased processed foods will help to drastically improve their child's health. What many don't know is that the mealtime environment in your home also affects your child's nutritional intake and health as well. Mealtime environment includes everything that's going on while your children are eating. It's the positive atmosphere, the style and manner in which food is served, and the conversation that keeps families together. Here are just a few tips to help your family get started.

1. Sit at the Table...Together:


Recent studies link regular family dinners with lower rates of obesity, eating disorders, substance abuse, teen pregnancy, depression, as well as higher grade-point averages and self-esteem. This is the time to reconnect with your children. It's also a time in which you can increase the variety in your child's diet through being a good food role model. When picky eaters sit at the table with family they are watching siblings, mom, and dad share a meal, and in turn they are more likely to try and enjoy new foods. There's no magic number for how long meals should last, but mealtimes should be around 20-30 minutes long.

2. Set up a Meal/Snack Routine: We all have a long list of things that can get in the way of keeping a consistent schedule. However, a general routine is best for children when it comes to obtaining adequate nutrition. Children should consume 3 meals per day and 2 or 3 structured snacks. Children have tiny stomachs and eating a meal/snack every 3 hours can actually assist in maintaining a healthy weight. Avoid grazing or just eating throughout the day, which doesn't allow the body to feel hungry and could prevent children from eating adequately

at mealtimes. On the other hand, being overly hungry can cause kids and adults to overeat. Therefore, a structured meal and snack routine is important for growing bodies. Just make sure those snacks are healthy choices such as raisins, carrots, pita with hummus, oranges, or Greek yogurt. An afterschool snack is a great way to refuel, and then hold off until dinner.

3. Electronics: Keep the TV off and any type of electronics out of sight when serving your child meals/snacks. Ever sat down in front of the TV with a bag of chips and 10 minutes later realized the bag was gone? Distracted eaters are not in tune with how much they are eating. Mindful eating occurs when the body can send signals to the brain, saying "I am full." When children and adults are focused on a show they are watching, they don't keep in touch with how much they are eating, which is crucial for weight regulation. Electronics of any kind can distract you and your child from the wonderful art, and vocabulary expander, of mealtime conversation.

4. Meal Time Pressure: Avoid commenting on how much or how little children eat. Children do not need to be coached, cheered-on, or

PEDIATRIC NUTRITION COUNSELING
Lindsey Carter, Registered Dietitian Nutritionist

Give your child a jumpstart to good health with optimal nutrition!

- Family friendly office
- Education and counseling with positive reinforcement
- Counseling may be covered by insurance

17 W Main Street, Middletown, MD 21769
410-598-4336
lindsey@back2basicsnutritionllc.com
www.back2basicsnutritionllc.com

pressured to eat their meals. This will backfire in the long run. Your child needs to hear and listen to their own internal voice which assists them in regulating how much or how little to eat at meals. Even positive pressure such as congratulating them on finishing their vegetables teaches children to eat more than is needed. Coaching them to eat more overrides their natural sense of satiety. Withholding dessert because they didn't finish everything on their plate only teaches children to overeat at their meal, and then stuff more in because they like the taste of a sweet treat. Force feeding and the "clean plate club" benefit no one. Mealtimes should be pleasant and fun, a time to catch up. Enjoy dinner and keep the conversation positive.


5. Serve New Foods: If broccoli is never offered, it will never be eaten. Increasing variety in your child's diet ensures added vitamins/minerals and promotes healthy eating. One way to take the pressure off with

picky eaters is to allow them to spit it out if they don't like it, just like you would. Try, and try again. It can take from 12-30 exposures of the same food for a child to accept it! Just because they didn't like it last week doesn't mean it's off the table forever. Check out a Maryland seasonal produce guide to pick out new fruits or vegetables to try when they're in season.

6. Family Style Serving: Serving meals where all food is placed on the table and passed around creates a wonderful environment for your child to grow. Children learn social and motor skills such as taking turns, sharing, and passing, pouring and scooping foods. Children also tend to take smaller portions of foods then when parents plate meals for them. Be ready for spills, but here in lies another learning opportunity...how to clean them up!

7. Little Chefs: Before, during, and after meals children can

participate. Assisting with cooking and preparing meals gives children life-long kitchen skills and builds fond memories with loved ones. Kids and parents alike are more apt to try something new if they've spent time in the kitchen preparing it. During meals, children can serve themselves, and after meals, they can clear the table. Food preparation and dish duty aren't just for parents!

What a huge responsibility we have as caregivers and parents to set our children up for an entire lifetime of healthy eating habits! We establish the food environment norms in the home. Find time to sit down to family meals together, allow conversation to flow without electronics, and enjoy each other's company without added mealtime pressure. 

Lindsey Carter is a Registered Dietitian Nutritionist and owner of Back 2 Basics Nutrition LLC in Middletown, Maryland. www.Back2BasicsNutritionLLC.com

A One-Stop, Pop-Up Shop!

Shop for *amazing* deals at our semi-annual event!



OUR SALE DATES:

Thursday, May 11 ★ 9am - 7pm

Friday, May 12 ★ 9am - 7pm

Saturday, May 13 ★ 9am - 5pm

Sunday, May 14 ★ 9am - 1pm

(Many Items 1/2 Off)

SALE LOCATION:

The Frederick Fairgrounds

The Null Building
797 East Patrick Street
Frederick, MD 21705

**SPEND \$50
GET \$5 OFF!**

WITH COUPON