Idaho Fit Kids=Happy Kids

Snacks for Kids

Does your child enjoy snacks *more* than the food on the dinner plate? Does your child see snacks as *special treats*? If so, you may have trouble getting your child to eat well at mealtime. Here are some ways to prevent snacks from spoiling your child's dinner.

- Children *cannot* eat enough "good nutrition" in just three meals. Think of snacks as small meals in between. Serve *healthy* snacks like fresh fruit slices, cheese or tuna and crackers, dry cereals, mini sandwiches, mini pizzas (made with half an English muffin, cheese and sauce), mini bagels and for children over three, crisp vegetables with dip. Leftovers make good snacks too.

- Give your child a choice between several healthy snacks. If he wants something sweet or salty instead tell him that this is what you have today and ask if he wants any. Be firm. Let him miss a snack if he refuses. Children will eat healthy snacks when they are hungry. But, they will eat chocolate any time!

- Schedule snacks around times your child is hungry. Offering a small snack an hour or more before a meal may make her less grumpy and more willing to eat at mealtime. If she isn't hungry at meals, you may need to adjust the snack schedule or serve a lighter snack.

- Avoid giving snacks to comfort, bribe or reward your child. Children who eat when bored or frustrated may have problems controlling their weight later on. Treat snacks the same way you treat other foods. You wouldn't offer broccoli to comfort or reward your child! Why offer candy? Comfort your child by talking to him, hugging him and playing with him.

- Serve snacks in interesting sizes and shapes. Offer them in a colorful bag. Cut out sandwiches with a cookie cutter. Visit the library for cookbooks that have ideas on making food "fun" for children.

- Avoid letting your child feel deprived. Offer cookies and chips occasionally. Include them in a meal. Instead of mashed potato, have potato chips once in a while. Give a cookie for dessert.

- Tell relatives and care givers about good snacks to offer or provide them yourself. You will need their support or your attempts will fail.

- Teach your child about good nutrition while shopping. Point out the healthy choices. Let her put the ones she wants into the cart.

- Limit your child's exposure to snack food commercials by limiting TV.

- As your child gets older, keep snacks on hand that he can get himself, like fresh fruit or cheese cubes.

- Set a good example by eating healthy snacks yourself. If you buy treats on occasion, keep them out of your child's reach.

Remember: Children can learn to like healthy foods!

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