



How to Grow a Healthy Preschooler

Too many American children are overweight. That's the bad news. The good news is that if we start early, we can prevent children from becoming obese as adults. Early childhood is the perfect time to help children learn healthy behaviors. Preschoolers are curious, eager to learn, and motivated to please adults. By following these proven strategies, we can help children develop healthy habits that will last a lifetime.

- 1 OFFER VARIETY:** Serve a variety of new and familiar fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and lean protein. After 10-15 exposures, most preschoolers will accept and enjoy new foods.
- 2 BE CONSISTENT:** Serve meals at the same time every day.
- 3 DRINK TO HEALTH:** Give children 4 to 6 cups of water throughout the day, especially after active play. Serve low-fat or non-fat milk, limit fruit juice to one serving, and never offer soda to preschoolers.
- 4 CREATE CALM:** Turn off the TV and get rid of other distractions during meals and snack times to encourage mindful eating. Relax and enjoy eating together.
- 5 DON'T JUDGE:** Let kids decide how much to eat of the healthful foods you offer. Avoid "clean plate rules," and rewarding or punishing kids for what they choose to eat.
- 6 TALK HEALTH, NOT LOOKS:** Talk with kids about building healthy, strong bodies. Avoid messages about being fat or thin or having an "ideal" body size.
- 7 LISTEN:** Encourage children to express feelings and help them problem-solve so they don't need to "eat their feelings" or rely on food for comfort.
- 8 DON'T USE FOOD:** Do not give or take away food as a reward or punishment for good or bad behavior.
- 9 PROMOTE PLAY:** Make sure children have at least one hour of active play each day. Limit TV and other screen time to 2 hours each day.
- 10 SCHEDULE SLEEP:** Make sure preschoolers get the 11 to 13 hours of sleep they need.

For more information about how to put these practices into place, please visit the Harris Obesity Prevention Effort (HOPE) website at www.hopenyu.org.



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