

Ways to make healthy eating less of a chore

By Jessica Keys

The conversations and attitudes we have with children about food can be linked to their eating habits. Use these new sayings developed by childhood obesity researchers to help guide children in a healthier direction during the holidays and beyond:

Old: *Clean your plate.*

New: *Eat when you're hungry, stop when you're full.*



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Forcing children to clean their plates can teach them to pair healthy dishes with anger and frustration. This frustration can evolve into guilt later in life when food is left on the plate and encourage overeating. Our bodies come equipped with natural systems to regulate food intake: hunger and fullness. Instead of overriding these innate signals with pressure to clean the plate, encourage kids to listen to their bodies and stop eating when they're satisfied.

Old: *Closely monitor each morsel.*

New: *Offer more healthful options.*

Instead of focusing on what not to eat, give your kids ample

opportunities to make good choices. Research shows the more fruits and vegetables you offer, the more kids will consume them. New options can take time; children might need to try a new food 15 times before accepting or learning to love it.

Old: *Ban kids from the kitchen.*

New: *Involve everyone in healthy meals.*

Preparing meals as a family can be fun, and kids will feel invested in healthy choices. As you dream up new ways to cook veggies, talk about how delicious they taste and how strong and smart their nutrients can make you. Encourage your children to get creative! If they help make the meal, they're more likely to eat it.

Old: *Skip dessert.*

New: *Balance "sometimes" foods with healthier choices.*

Calling concentrated sweets like cupcakes and cookies "sometimes" foods can help you keep them in their proper place. When your kids face choices at events, especially during the holidays, teach them to balance their plates with these "sometimes" foods as well as several nutritious options. Try baked apples or other fruit options for after dinner nutrition and satisfaction.

Old: *Nag kids about their weight.*

New: *Model healthy, positive habits.*

Set an example by eating more fruits and veggies yourself. A recent study by Australian researchers found this has a powerful influence on children's eating habits. Model other healthy lifestyle habits, too: Stay active, get adequate sleep, and maintain a positive relationship with food and your body.

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