

Parenting - Tips for Parents on Feeding Children

- Concerned parents often ask what they can do to prevent childhood obesity and/or eating disorders. Here's my advice:
- Avoid power struggles over food (don't make food that important);
- Don't use food as a reward/punisher (it's a basic need, not a tool for discipline);
- Supply a healthy range of tasty meals and snacks and let the child choose **WHAT** and **HOW MUCH** to eat (requiring a "No thank-you" bite may be ok for some children);
- Don't fill your home with sugary drinks or foods high in sugar and/or fat (which includes almost any juice or prepared/convenience food); you didn't grow up eating these foods so don't expect your child to resist them or eat them frequently and not become obese;
- Take the time to prepare as many whole foods as possible (that means it didn't come from a box, can, or drive-through window); fast food is for emergencies such as a cross-country trip once a year!
- Exercise frequently yourself and involve your child in daily outdoor tasks and activities, even if he/she isn't into team sports (the average child now spends about 7 hours per day in front of some kind of screen- no one can do that and not become obese!);
- Be very careful about the messages you send children about people who are over-weight and how much age matters; help them to embrace their bodies at every age by embracing your own;
- Model how to listen to your body by eating when you are hungry and stopping when you are full, as well as how to satisfy your thirst with water alone;
- Do not diet or get on a scale regularly and expect your child not to do so;
- Remember that intense focus on your child's eating habits (such as withholding, hiding, or locking up foods) can backfire and cause the child to obsess about food, eat more, and become more prone to emotional eating later in life;
- When talking to your children about healthy eating and exercise, speak in terms of the benefits to the heart, lungs, immune system, etc., rather than in terms of weight or looks;
- Involve your child in choosing healthy foods at the store and preparing them- I have found that kids will eat almost anything they choose and prepare themselves!