

Raising Healthy Eaters

Lesson Objectives

After this program, participants will be able to:

- » Understand the importance of raising healthy eaters.
- » Identify the risks of unhealthy eating.
- » Discuss the reasons children might become picky eaters.
- » Facilitate strategies to help children become healthy eaters.
- » Adopt ways to make mealtimes easier and less stressful.

Intended Audience

- » Caregivers and family members responsible for feeding children of all ages
- » Babysitter groups
- » Daycare facilities
- » New parents/guardians
- » School-age parents/guardians

Introduction

Raising children is a difficult task. Parents can influence the development of many milestones, including the development of their children's relationship with food. With the latest data showing that less than 10 percent of Kansans consume the recommended daily fruit and vegetable intake, making sure your children get off to a good start eating healthfully is crucial. However, this is easier said than done. Most parents know that providing healthy foods is important; but getting their kids to eat those healthy foods is a completely different matter.

Children are born hungry. Next to water and air, food is the most important element of life. This lesson shows that raising a healthy eater is less about what a child eats and more about how she eats. A child's relationship with food is a reflection of the parent and child's relationship and is built with a balance of trust, structure, and freedom. It's not an easy task, but it is an important one. The risks of not eating healthfully are wide ranging, from potential low immunity and single nutrient deficiency to malnutrition.



Suggested Program Preparation

- » Review this leader's guide and the related fact sheet (MF3444).
- » Gather copies (or make copies) of the Raising Healthy Eaters fact sheet and participant survey from PEARS for each audience member.

Allow 45 minutes to an hour for the lesson. If possible, answer audience questions as they arise rather than holding questions to the end of the program.

Suggested Teaching Activities

- » Ask participants to share their frustrations and successes with feeding children.
- » Write down their questions about how to raise healthy eaters.
- » Review why children become unhealthy eaters:
 - » Physical/biological issues — illness, developmental delays, sensory sensitivities
 - » Environment — Includes not only the types of food available within the environment but also the method of feeding and especially the model of feeding done by the feeders.
 - » Constant snacking or drinking (milk/juice) between designated meal and snack times.

Only provide water during this in-between time.

- » Parental-controlled feeding — Creates food obsessions, secret eating, and overeating.
- » Emotionally enforced feeding — Avoid using foods to enforce an emotion or a behavior. Try non-food rewards such as: stickers, tickets, books, praise, or time spent together reading or going for a walk, or extra minutes on the playground to celebrate good behavior rather than sweet treats.
- » Principles of Raising Healthy Eaters:
 - » Follow the Division of Responsibility in Feeding:
 - » Parents are responsible for what, when, and where the child eats.
 - » Children are responsible for how much they eat.
 - » Parents are NOT responsible for making the child eat. That is the child's choice.
 - » Children are NOT responsible for what food is served. That is the parent's choice.
 - » Serve healthy options from all five food groups
 - » Schedule three meals and two snacks every/

most days, and only allow the child to eat at these designated times.

- » Limit non-nutritive foods because they're "sometimes foods" and risk making children feel too full to enjoy more nutritive foods.
- » Keep mealtimes pleasant:
 - » Studies suggest it can take 10 to 15 exposures of a new food before a child will accept it. The best response for kids saying they don't like a food is "That's okay. You don't have to eat it."
 - » Work to have something your child likes on her plate, especially when you serve new foods or prepare familiar items in a new way.
 - » Make the healthy choice the easy choice: cut up fruit and veggies and have whole grain snacks available.
 - » Keep portion sizes small. Big servings can overwhelm tiny eaters.
 - » Consider keeping foods separate because some children prefer single foods rather than mixed dishes.
 - » Try to keep mealtimes to 30 minutes or less.



- » If a child refuses to eat at all, remind yourself that it's OK for her to skip a meal. Just let her know the next time she can eat will be at the next scheduled meal/snack time.
- » Cultivate hunger by playing outside before dinner or go for a walk. Also, only serve water between meals. Kids can fill up on milk and juice.
- » Sometimes meals can compete with play opportunities; most children will be too distracted to eat once they start playing. When eating at a restaurant with an indoor playground, have the meal first, then let him play. If he refuses to eat at all, just feed him at the next meal time.
- » If desserts are part of the meal, let your child have her portion even if she doesn't eat any other part of the meal. Withholding desserts until children finish their meals can teach overeating. Withholding can also unintentionally send the message that dessert is the only "good" part of the meal being served.
- » Set a good example:
 - » Prioritize eating by making a schedule of meals and snacks.
 - » Don't know what to fix? Let MyPlate guide your menu planning to make sure that most meals include all five food groups.
 - » Create a foundational list of 20 meals that are easy to make, then experiment with new recipes when you have extra time/energy.

References

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Kansas State University Agricultural Experiment Station and Cooperative Extension Service

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MF3445 August 2019