

Healthy Eating for Healthy Kids:

As a Homeopath and Practitioner of Traditional Chinese Medicine I am often asked by proactive or concerned parents what to feed their children for optimal health. Many of the dietary recommendations that I give for children are the same for any age. What we put in our bodies has a significant impact on how we feel and how well we are able to perform. Clean air, clean food and drink are essential for optimum physical, mental and emotional health. We all want the best for our children, so what is best when it comes to their nutrition?

The simplest and single most important advice for the entire family is to strive towards a "Whole Food" diet. This is not a fad, it is what we have been doing for the last few thousand years. Eating whole foods, means eating foods that are as close to their natural form as possible. The less refined, processed and packaged a food is, the better it is for you. For example, a baked potato compared to a potato chip. A chicken breast is better than a chicken nugget or a cold cut. A bowl of rice is better than a rice cake, a rice that takes 30 minutes to cook is better than a minute rice and brown rice is better than white. Similarly, choose sprouted wheat or wholegrain bread instead of white. Plain yogurt and fresh blueberries is better than blueberry-flavoured yogurt. An apple is better than apple juice. Cooked oatmeal is better than cereal. Homemade soup is better than canned. The benefits of such examples include higher nutrient levels, beneficial phytochemicals, digestive enzymes, and fibre, as well as allowing for more stable blood sugars. Overall, whole food contains more clean energy, synergy and vitality in the food.

Another significant problem with packaged and processed foods is that they can contain a variety of harmful additives. These might include added sugar, flavourings, colourings, preservatives, stimulants, sodium, hydrogenated oils or trans-fatty acids to name a few. It is wise to read ingredient labels carefully and choose products with as few of these as possible, preferably none. If in doubt whether an ingredient is safe or not, if you do not recognize it or know what it means, then you probably don't want to eat it. In some cases these additives can lead directly to health problems. Sugar, as a common example, not only promotes obesity, exacerbates mood swings and unstable blood sugar but will also suppress the immune system and increase phlegm and mucous production. Although more important for some than others, cow's milk¹ is also known to increase phlegm and mucous. Sugar and cows milk/dairy is often best avoided, at least temporarily, in children with problems such as chronic or recurring colds, acute respiratory problems, ear infections, allergies or eczema². There are many sources linking the intake of food additives and colourings to a variety of serious diseases, including behavioural disorders and even epilepsy in children.

Children are particularly susceptible to the negative effects of too many sweets. Sugar can be hidden in a variety of forms in packaged food such as glucose, sucrose, or any word ending in 'ose', corn syrup or most syrups, evaporated cane juice, agave nectar and so on. It is in yogurt, cereals, peanut butter, granola or snack bars and countless other packaged foods. Fortunately there are alternatives. Choose plain yogurt and add fresh fruit. The same for milk, choose white, not chocolate. There are cereals that are fruit sweetened, or even better a homemade granola, oatmeal or porridge with fruit and nuts added. There are nut butters made from 100% nuts. For snacks, use fresh fruit, nuts, seeds, veggies, hummus, yogurt, cheese and all natural crackers, the possibilities are endless. When it comes to

drinks, pop is nothing but flavoured sugar water, even pure juice contains too much natural sugar and is best extremely watered down. Water should always be the primary drink of choice for children.

It is also important to remember that kids do have different nutritional needs than adults. A fat free diet, for example, is not appropriate for a child. Children should have a proper balance of healthy fats, protein and carbohydrates. Children should not be involved in any strict raw food diets, juice fasts or cleanse diets of any type. Although beneficial for some, the cool and cleansing nature of such practices can be harmful to a child's developing digestive system. Raw fruits and vegetables are great in moderation, however warm and cooked foods are generally preferable, especially in the winter months. Similarly, an apple at room temperature is better than one right out of the refrigerator. Eating seasonal fruits and vegetables, eating more local and eating organic are always great when possible.

Healthy eating is essential to raising a healthy child. It is a lifestyle choice both for you and your children. The best way to teach your children is by example. Making healthy food choices as a parent will create a positive impression on what your children will want to eat. You can also teach your children the benefits of healthy food, like carrots make your eyes see better, pasta or rice gives you energy, lentils or fish makes your muscles strong and cheese and broccoli make your bones strong. You can also explain the detriments of junk food after they getting a stomach ache from eating too much of the wrong thing. Limiting excessive snacking throughout the day will keep them hungrier and less picky when it comes to mealtime. Allow your children to be part of the food preparation, cooking and baking. It can be messy but a lot of fun. Always take the time to eat together as a family at least once per day. Chew your food well, eat slowly, mindfully and enjoy.

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¹ *There are many calcium rich alternatives to cow's milk/dairy such as goats cheese/yogurt/milk, soy beans/milk/tofu, broccoli, collards, leafy greens and salmon to name a few.*

² *Dietary recommendations for serious or long standing health issues must always be made in consultation with your Health Care Provider. Food allergies or intolerances are also an important consideration in chronic health problems.*