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# When It Comes To Fitness & Nutrition Parents Can Help Their Kids Make Healthy And Fun Food Choices

By Franci Cohen, Personal trainer, Certified Nutritionist & Exercise Physiologist | Image Credit: Google images

The start of a new school year brings bittersweet feelings for every parent. You can happily send your child off to their next year of learning and adventure but also worry if they will make the right choices when it comes to a healthy lifestyle. It's hard enough getting them to polish off their veggies under your watchful eye, so how can we be sure they will continue the right eating habits outside of the home? In support of September's National Childhood Obesity Awareness Month, Franci Cohen, personal trainer, certified nutritionist and exercise physiologist, shares her tips on keeping your kids on a healthy path

## DO PLAY WITH YOUR FOOD

Be creative! Kids often choose unhealthy snacks because they come in shiny bags with bright colors and pictures! Every day after school, try to have an interesting fruit/veggie combo ready and waiting. "When my oldest daughter was 3 years old, I used to put Pomegranate seeds in her princess tea cups, and we pretended they were jewels from Cinderella's castle!" explains Franci. "It was her favorite treat!" For older kids try using cookie cutters to cut fun shapes out of melons and put them on skewers. Serve your fruit kabobs with several dipping sauces such as yogurt or peanut butter dips.

## KNOW ABOUT VITAMINS

Teach your children about the importance and functions of various vitamins and minerals, and make themes in your kitchen. For example, this week is "Vitamin C week"! Encourage your children to eat as many healthy foods that are high in Vitamin C, and reward them for identifying foods high in the vitamin, and for sharing info on vitamin c with other friends and family. This will excite your children and may be the confidence boost they need to choose an orange over an unhealthy snack.

## USE VISUAL REINFORCEMENT

Create a nutrition chart listing each child's name and place on the refrigerator. Each day your children come home from school ask them if they ate all the yummy, nutritious



snacks you packed in their lunch or if they took advantage of a "swappportunity" at the cafeteria or with a classmate. For example, you packed some orange slices but they decided to have a banana instead, or they declined an extra dessert offered by a friend. If they made a healthy swap for the day, they receive a sticker on the chart. Look online for stickers of fruits, veggies, and other healthy foods. Once any child in the family gets 10 stickers on their chart, they get rewarded by choosing their favorite dinner for one night!

## FITNESS TIPS FOR YOUNGSTERS

- Give your children pedometers. They can be purchased for as little as \$5, and are so motivating! Your children will love tracking how many steps they take each day, and will develop a healthy competitive edge with each other as well!
- Skip the car ride, and walk your children to and from school each day. It's a healthy way to start and end the day, and will give you some quiet quality time to chat about the day!
- Encourage your children to join a sports league or try out for the school gymnastics team. Sports and athletics can be beneficial not only to the body and mind, but it can boost a child's confidence and help it soar! 📺

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