

"Think like a supermarket!" says mom Connie Evers; "Eye level is where the cartons of yogurt, snack packs of carrots, and apples go."



Eating Right

Tips and strategies for encouraging healthy eating habits in your family **By T. Susan Chang**

Most of us have a pretty good idea of what healthy eating is: lots of fruits and vegetables and not too much fat and sugar. But when it comes to kids, as every parent knows, understanding what's good for you is only a start. Even if we shop smart, it's quite another thing to get our kids to eat food that isn't blue or purple, doesn't come in a shiny package, and doesn't make funny noises when they eat it. So to find new strategies, we turned to some dietary experts who also happen to have kids of their own.

Be a gatekeeper. Perhaps the simplest way to get your kids to eat healthy food is to remove less-healthy options. "Control what goes into your house," advises Jill Foster, a physician nutrition specialist in Birmingham, Alabama. "What's in the house gets eaten." Foster has found that her four-year-old will

HEALTHY WEB SITE

The Right Amount to Eat



Ever wonder just how much everyone in your family should be eating? "My Pyramid Plan" is a tool on the USDA Web site MyPyramid.gov that calculates daily caloric needs based on age, gender, and physical activity.

Healthy Fun

happily munch on healthy snacks when there isn't an alternative.

Keep healthy food in sight.

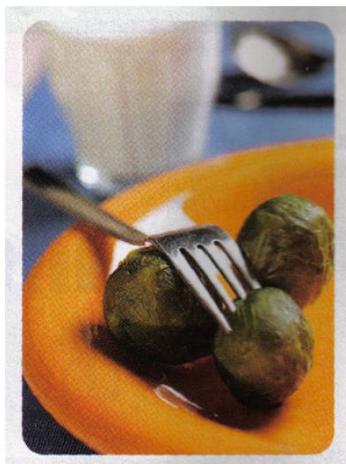
As for those less-good-for-you foods that you do bring home, keep them out of reach in high cabinets. "Arrange your home so high-calorie foods are out of sight," suggests Foster, "and healthier foods are more visible on countertops." This health-based food storage approach (see example, right) lets your cupboard enforce the house food rules for you, helping to make snacktime less of a flash point.

Make healthy food convenient.

Wholesome foods, particularly fruits and vegetables, can often take a little time to prepare, which to a "starving" child can seem an eternity. Dietitian Karen Ehrens of Bismarck, North Dakota, sidesteps that problem with advance planning. "As soon as I get home from the store, I'll wash up my carrots and celery and put them in ice water in a lidded container," she says. "We've been doing that for three years, and my eight-year-old daughter is definitely eating more vegetables."

Make learning about food fun.

Taking some of the mystery out of where food comes from can work wonders for some selective eaters. "I cooked a lot more with my youngest son after his brother and sister were in school," reports Registered Dietitian Connie Evers. "He absolutely loved cooking things and at thirteen continues to be my most adventurous eater." For research dietitian Amy Pflum, the simple act of planting a garden helped change her eight-year-old daughter's view of eating vegetables. "I asked her what she'd like to grow, and I suggested a few things. That really worked. Now she tries everything from the garden."



• SUCCESS STORY •

A Tip for Trying New Foods

Many families have a single-bite policy to get kids to try food, but the Straumans of Mahtomedi, Minnesota, take the rule two bites further. Each family member, including Mom and Dad, has to take three bites of a new dish — the first bite to try it, the second to decide, the third to really know. Mom Jane reports, "The big thing the kids found out was that food can taste different after a few bites."

STEALTH HEALTH

A Method for Organizing Your Food

One way to encourage good eating habits at home is to store your food so healthy items are low on the shelves where they're most accessible to your child. For guidance, check out the rating system called "Go, Slow, Whoa," created by the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute to help families consider a food's nutritional value * versus its calories (go to www.nhlbi.nih.gov and search "go slow whoa"). •



"Whoa" foods are high in calories and low in nutritional value. Examples: cookies, candy, and regular soda.

"Slow" foods have a moderate amount of calories and nutritional value. Examples: 100% fruit juice, peanut butter, and nuts.

"Go" foods are relatively low in calories and have a lot of nutritional S value. Examples: whole grain threads, fig bars, land pretzels.

HealthyFun

A Sporting Way to Explain Serving Size

Visual cues offer an effective way to show kids how much food they should be eating at meals. The dinner below, adapted from *The Portion Teller* by Lisa R. Young (Morgan Road Books, 2005), depicts portions for eight-year-olds who exercise less than 30 minutes a day.

Keep an eye on portion size.

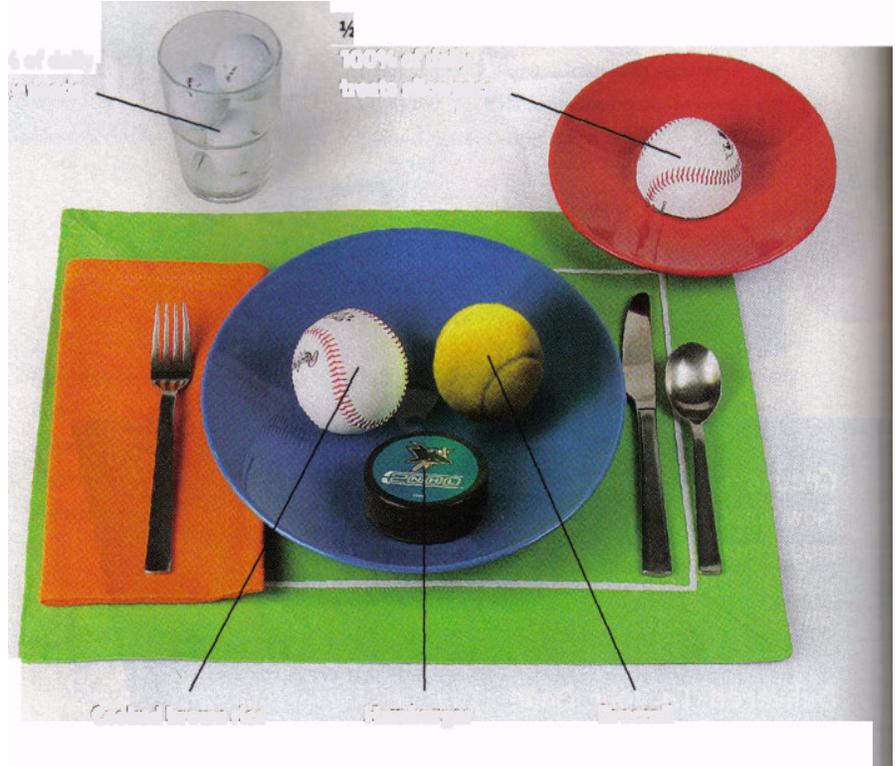
One perennial source of parental stress is the struggle over just how much food our kids should be eating, whether you're trying to get a selective eater to take a bite of anything green or rein in a kid with a sweet tooth who wants seconds of dessert. With either extreme, knowing the size of a healthy portion can give some needed perspective. The USDA offers a customized set of portion guidelines on the Web (see "The Right Amount to Eat," page 64).

Explain portions with objects.

Many packaged or prepared foods that a kid would eat as a single serving are actually multiple portions, but you'd only discover that by carefully reading the nutrition label. To help kids make sense of these often confusing measurements, nutritionists suggest using some portion-size stand-ins that they can more easily relate to. Connie Evers, for example, likes to use a deck of cards to show her son the size of a healthy portion of meat. (For other serving-size visual aids, see the meal examples at right.) And here's a tip from Jill Foster: if the proper portion looks small on your dinner plate, serve it on something smaller, such as a salad plate. "It makes the plate look filled," she explains.

Set a healthy example. Finally, keep in mind that eating meals together isn't just a great way to catch up on your family's day and share one another's company. Nutritionists note that the family dinner table is also where we can model the healthy eating habits we want our kids to learn. That's food for thought indeed.

T. Susan Chang is a food writer and cookbook reviewer who lives in Leverett, Massachusetts.



Cooked brown rice
1 cup
40% of daily
grain needs

Hamburger 3
ounces 75%
of daily
protein needs

Broccoli
1 cup
67% of daily
vegetable needs



Mealtime Games That Keep Kids at the Table

Dinner Games and Activities is a box of 51 challenges designed to get kids to eat their dinner and have fun at the table (Family TimeFun, ftfgames.com, \$16). The fun includes:

Kyle's Lucky Vegetables Players roll a die, then must eat that number of bites of a vegetable. The winner is the first person to finish his vegetables.



Goober Goat One person starts with a farm-related word, then each player comes up with a new word linked to the last. Corn, for example, might be followed by *bread, oven, and refrigerator*. See how far from the farm you get.

Counting Moo Participants count off around a table, replacing even numbers with the word moo. If you mess up, you have to drink your milk.