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Breaking Your Gradeschooler's Unhealthy Food Habit



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Just like any good investment, teaching your child healthy habits now will pay off in the long run. Kids who nibble on nutrient-rich foods from a young age are more likely to maintain those good habits later in life. Although it can be easy for families to slip into unhealthy food habits, with some practice, you can steer your child toward healthier choices.

Beyond Restriction

When you're trying to break an unhealthy food habit, forbidding certain foods that already are in the home may lead to behavioral problems such as tantrums and sneaking food. The more you restrict a certain food, the more tempting it will be for children. That is why food should not be labeled as "good" or "bad," nor should it be restricted. Instead, keep less nutritious food at home so kids know it's available and they don't have to sneak it. Ask them how eating "fun" or "play" foods such as desserts makes them feel physically and emotionally. Talk to them about how it feels to eat too much and how they can eat a satisfying amount without feeling uncomfortable.

Focus on Nutritious Foods

Be sure to have plenty of healthful alternatives available to fill the spot of any foods you may have removed from the home. Wash and cut fresh fruits and vegetables into pieces ahead of time; then,

place them within easy reach in the refrigerator. Gradeschoolers feel more independent when they have options, so try keeping a snack drawer of healthier items and let them choose a food from it every day. If you want your kids to eat more fruit, offer it pre-sliced or cut in fun shapes.

Learning to Like New Foods

A carrot may not be as exciting as a cookie — at first. But take heart, stick with the plan and celebrate small victories as you make gradual changes.

Eating is a learned behavior and just as kids learn how to ride a bike by falling numerous times, they learn how to eat by trying new foods at least 15 times. If they don't like it, no problem. Don't force it, but try again.

As you make a commitment to healthier eating, you'll reap some great benefits — both now and in the future. Setting up children for a lifelong habit of a healthy relationship with food will help them live a more productive and enjoyable life.