



Learning to Grow

MAKING A DIFFERENCE TOGETHER

UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII ♥ WINDWARD COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Encouraging Healthy Eating Habits

Behaviors we repeat most often become etched into the neural pathways of our brains and become automatic. This is how habits are formed. As a parent or care provider, you significantly impact the habits your young child forms—through repeated actions and routines.

Forming healthy eating habits begins early. Consistently teaching your child to eat nutritiously will help his growth, development, and overall health throughout his life. The following are ideas to practice with your child:

- ♥ **Introduce a new food several times, even if he turns away or shows no interest in it.** As you introduce new foods to your child, he may make a face; this doesn't necessarily mean he doesn't like what he's eating. He may just be surprised at the new flavor or texture. If he rejects a food, try offering it again another day. Keep in mind that your child may need to taste a food several times before he happily accepts it.
- ♥ **Implement the "one bite rule"**—a house rule that states you must at least try everything on your plate. There are some foods that, like all humans, your child will just not like. But, we should not let the child assume that he will not like something because of the way it looks. If he tries it, he may realize that it is not so bad.
- ♥ **Model healthy mealtime habits**—turn off the TV and other media devices so you can enjoy your mealtime eating together as a family.

This newsletter will provide other tips/actions you can take to instill healthy eating habits in your youngster. By encouraging good eating habits now, you can set the stage for his healthy lifestyle in the future.



In This Newsletter:

To support you in fostering your child's healthy development and school readiness, this newsletter includes:

- ♥ **Age-specific information and suggestions** about activities to do with your infant, toddler, or preschooler,
- ♥ **Featured activities** for each age group,
- ♥ **How This Helps:** a summary of your child's development by doing these activities together,
- ♥ **Community Resources:** for more information about this topic, and
- ♥ **Suggested Books:** a list of books to read with your child.

Infants

Infants have immature digestive systems—they lack all the enzymes needed to break down foods into a digestible form. Breast milk provides all the necessary nutrients your young infant needs to thrive. Babies who are breastfed for at least 6 months have a reduced risk of infections, illnesses, allergies, asthma, and even obesity. Therefore, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends exclusive breast-feeding until 6 months of age. Infant formula is an acceptable alternative for babies whose mothers are not able or decide not to breastfeed.

As your infant gets older you will start introducing solid foods to him. Keep in mind that all babies are unique; therefore, always check with your child's health care provider for when and how to start feeding him solid foods. The following are general guidelines for helping your baby get a good healthy start.

♥ **Introduction to solid food** – Most infants start eating iron fortified infant cereal such as rice cereal at four to six months of age, then move on to pureed or mashed food. It may be good to start with vegetables and meats first, one to two tablespoons at a time, before introducing the sweet flavors of fruit. Gradually



introduce each new food item over a period of several days and watch carefully for any allergic reactions such as diarrhea, vomiting or unusual rashes, before introducing the next new food item. Do not sweeten your baby's food with sugar or honey or add salt.

- ♥ **Finger foods** – Babies are generally ready to begin feeding themselves with finger foods such as dry cereal or teething biscuits around seven to ten months of age.
- ♥ **Table foods** – Most infants are ready to eat soft, cooked table foods around eight to twelve months of age. Encourage your baby to explore eating and let him practice feeding himself. He may make a mess at first, but it is important that he practice on his own; which, will help him to develop his small muscles and eye-hand coordination, as well as self-feeding skills.

Activity for Infants: *Cereal Spill*

Adapted from *ASQ-3 Learning Activities* by Elizabeth Twombly and Ginger Fink

Materials:

- A few pieces of round dry cereal
- Plastic bottle
- Plastic container with a lid

What to Do:

1. When your baby starts eating finger foods, put a few pieces of round dry cereal in a plastic bottle. See if baby can figure out how to tip over the bottle to get the cereal.
2. When he gets a little older, put cereal in a container with the lid on loosely. Let him take the lid off. You may have to show him how to take the lid off and get the cereal out. Soon he will do it by himself.

(See page 5 for information on how doing these kinds of activities with your child helps his development and school readiness.)



Toddlers

As your toddler transitions to the family diet, model healthy eating habits by eating fruits and vegetables and making nutritious food choices.

Here are some guidelines and tips to promote healthy eating habits in your toddler:

- ♥ **Meal and portion size:** Your toddler should be eating three healthy meals a day, plus one or two snacks. An average toddler-sized meal is one ounce of meat, one to two tablespoons of vegetable, one to two tablespoons of fruit, and one-quarter slice of bread.
- ♥ **Give healthy choices.** Your child is more likely to eat it if he chooses it himself, but have him select from healthy foods. For example, offer an apple or an orange. Other healthy choices include: small cubes of cheese and diced apples, plain low-fat yogurt with sliced



strawberries, whole grain low sugar dry cereal, sliced bananas, cooked-diced carrots, and steamed broccoli.

- ♥ **Milk and water are the healthiest liquid choices for toddlers.** Juice, even when labeled 100% fruit juice, can harm your child's teeth and add unneeded calories to his diet. If you give your child juice, do so in moderation or water it down. Do not give your child soft drinks.
- ♥ **Talk about healthy food** – It's never too early to start talking about what foods make up a balanced diet. Use this as an opportunity to talk about a variety of food and allowing him to try new fruits, vegetables, and proteins.



Activity for Toddlers: *Let's Put the Groceries Away*

Materials: None

What to do:

1. After a trip to the market, ask your child to help you put the groceries away.
2. Talk about the different items, what you use them for, and where to store them.
3. Give your child items that are stored on low shelves. As you give your child items, use descriptive and directional words. For example, "Put the small can of tomato sauce on the bottom shelf."
4. To make it more fun, play music while you unload the groceries.



(See page 5 for information on how doing these kinds of activities with your child helps his development and school readiness.)

Preschoolers

As your child grows older, the opportunity to explore and identify different types of food can become even more enjoyable. Involve your child in food shopping and meal preparation whenever you can. When you engage your child in the whole process – first shopping for, then seeing the food show up at home in the kitchen and then on his plate, he will begin to understand how meals come together. Plan a visit to a farm so he can see the full progression – from farm to table. Furthermore, when you involve your child in meal preparation, he learns about nutrition, gains a sense of accomplishment, and he may be more willing to try foods that he has helped to prepare.



Here are some additional tips to help you promote healthy eating habits in your preschooler:

- ♥ **Keep a schedule.** Just as you plan the time for breakfast, lunch and dinner, also plan on the time that your child will eat a snack. Continuous snacking may lead to overeating, but snacks that are planned at specific times can be part of a nutritious diet without spoiling your child's appetite.
- ♥ **Make a wide variety of healthful snack foods available at home.** Choose one day a week to package snacks with your child, such as fruit and vegetable sticks, in snack-size bags. This practice will enable him to have access to healthy snacks throughout the week and encourage him to make healthy food choices.
- ♥ **Start a vegetable garden.** Gardens don't have to be huge; there are many ways to grow a successful garden, even in an apartment. Your child will be more inclined to eat something that he planted.

Activity for Preschoolers: *A Trip to the Market*

Materials:

Paper	Child-sized scissors
Pencil	Grocery ads
Tape/glue	

What to Do:

1. With your child, make a grocery list. Look at the grocery ads in the free newspapers and have him cut out pictures of the items that you need. Tape or glue the pictures onto the paper and have him watch you write the words as you spell them out. "We need bananas...b-a-n -a-n-a spells banana."
2. Talk about the price of the items. "The bananas are on sale here for 89 cents a pound."
3. Take your list with you when you go to the market, and with your child, find the items you need.
4. As you find the items, talk about things you see in the market, where items are located and the different types of foods. For example, "Look, these are the same because they are all apples, but they are different because they are different colors and sizes."
5. Before going to the check-out line, ask him to check that you got all items on your list.

(See page 5 for information on how doing these kinds of activities with your child helps his development and school readiness.)



How This Helps

The activities suggested in this newsletter help promote many different aspects of development:

Physical Development

- ♥ Learn through his senses: seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching
- ♥ Use and strengthen small muscles, fingers, hands, and toes

Social and Emotional Development

- ♥ Feel important and good about himself
- ♥ Learn to cooperate with others

Language and Literacy Development

- ♥ Build verbal skills, vocabulary, and use of descriptive language
- ♥ Increase his observation, listening and understanding skills, and attention span

Cognitive Development

- ♥ Understand concept of “same and different”
- ♥ Increase mathematical concepts such as quantity and relationships (classification, positions)

Kids in the Kitchen

Cooking teaches valuable lessons. As you follow this recipe with your child, show him how to safely handle the items and allow him to do as much as he is capable of. Ask questions throughout the process to encourage his thinking skills. Most of all, have fun!

Baked Tofu Nuggets

Ingredients:

- 1 block firm or extra-firm tofu, pressed
- 1/3 cup milk
- 2 tablespoon mustard
- 1 teaspoon onion powder
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon black pepper
- ¾ cup bread crumbs

Directions:

1. Press the tofu between two pans layered with cloth or paper towels for at least an hour to remove most of the water content.
2. Slice the pressed tofu into 2 inch sized pieces.
3. Together with your child, whisk milk, mustard, and spices in a bowl.
4. In a separate bowl, have the bread crumbs prepared.
5. Take one piece of tofu and dip it into the milk mixture, then put it into the bread crumbs bowl.
6. Have your child cover the tofu piece with bread crumbs, making sure to cover the tofu completely.
7. Place the tofu piece onto a baking sheet.
8. Repeat the process until all the tofu pieces are covered with bread crumbs. Make sure to lay the tofu pieces in a single layer on the baking sheet.
9. Bake at 350 degrees for 25 minutes, turning once, until golden brown.



Community Resources

Choose My Plate

www.choosemyplate.gov

Current nutrition guide published by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), which depicts the five food groups on a plate. The website includes healthy eating tips, growth charts, recipes, menus and much more.

American Academy of Pediatrics' Healthy Children

healthychildren.org/growinghealthy

Provides comprehensive information on healthy living at every age level and includes articles, safety and prevention tips, information on health issues, realistic parent strategies on healthy snacking and finger foods, and other advice.



Suggested Books

Recommended by **Hawaii State Public Library** www.librarieshawaii.org.

Infants and Toddlers

My Very First Book of Food by Eric Carle

This children's book is divided into an upper and lower half. Children are able to match each animal with the food that it eats.

Little Miss Muffet by Tracey Moroney

This well-known nursery rhyme will hold your infant's attention as you read it aloud. This board book may well become baby's favorite and an invitation to read many other nursery rhymes over and over again!

Preschoolers

Me Hungry!! By Jeremy Tankyard

This book teaches children about the food chain. It takes you on an adventure of a child who is hungry.

You Are What You Eat and Other Mealtime Hazards by Serge Bloch

A young boy who is careful about what he eats, receives food-based advice from family and friends. This is a great introduction to idioms and similes such as: "cool as a cucumber" and "drives her bananas."



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