

# American Dietetic Association Says National Nutrition Month® Is a Great Time to Teach Kids to Eat Right

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CHICAGO - For some parents, getting their children to eat healthy, nutritious foods can seem like an endless battle. From hiding vegetables in foods the kids like to withholding treats and privileges for not eating their dinners, parents have struggled with this problem for generations. But it doesn't have to be this way, according to experts at the American Dietetic Association. During National Nutrition Month and beyond, there are things you can do to help your children eat right.

Registered dietitian and ADA Spokesperson Melinda Johnson says teaching children healthful eating habits is easiest when you start them young.

"It is never too early to help your child develop a healthy relationship with food," says Johnson. "Healthy habits that begin in childhood can stay with your children as they grow."

Johnson offers these tips to help raise a healthy eater:

- **Make family mealtimes a priority:** Plan healthy meals in advance to ensure that you are offering a wide range of healthy items. "Research shows that children who eat with their family tend to have a healthier diet," says Johnson. "With busy schedules it can be hard to sit down for a family meal, but even one or two nights a week can have a positive effect." Breakfast or lunch can be eaten together if a family dinner is not an option.
- **Be flexible about food:** Being overly restrictive about food can lead to an unhealthy preoccupation with food. "Never offer food as a reward or a punishment," says Johnson. "You can't expect perfection but you can make sure that the majority of choices are healthy." Also, if it seems that a picky eater isn't open to new choices, be persistent. "Most kids need several exposures to a new food before becoming comfortable with a new item," Johnson says.
- **Encourage input:** It is important to seek your child's involvement in the family's menu "Bring kids into the kitchen by allowing them to help with the menu and do age-appropriate tasks like setting the table or tearing lettuce for the salad."
- **Get active:** "A proper diet is just one ingredient for a healthy lifestyle," Johnson says. "Planning regular physical activities as a family is a great way to encourage your kids to get active."
- **Be a good role model:** "Children learn from their parents," Johnson says. "Parents can be a great influence on your children simply by having a healthy relationship with food and engaging in physical activity."

The American Dietetic Association is the world's largest organization of food and nutrition professionals. ADA is committed to improving the nation's health and advancing the profession of dietetics through research, education and advocacy. Visit the American Dietetic Association at [www.eatright.org](http://www.eatright.org).

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