Helping your child make healthy choices can be hard.

Reasons for this include:

- Easy access to fast food, sugary beverages, and foods high in fat, sugar, and sodium[1-3]
- Large portion sizes[1-2]
- Advertisement of unhealthy foods on TV[3]
- Less opportunities for physical activity[2-3]

Fortunately, parents can use what are known as "healthy defaults" to help kids make healthy choices.

What are Healthy Defaults?

Default options are choices that people make automatically when they don't actively choose other options.[4-5] In other words, default choices are the easiest or most convenient.

For example, a parent may default to offering chips or cookies at snack time because these items were on sale at the store and are readily available to eat at home. Offering something else would require extra effort.

Parents can make changes to their regular routine or environment in order to create healthier default options for both them and their kids.[4-5] Making the healthy choice the easiest one helps take the stress out of feeding your child healthful foods.

Ready to learn more?

Visit these websites for more info on healthy eating and physical activity for preschoolers:

- **MyPlate:**
  https://www.choosemyplate.gov/
- **Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics:**
  https://www.eatright.org/
- **American Academy of Pediatrics:**
  https://healthychildren.org/

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References:
1) Kumar and Kelly, 2017.
2) Sahoo et al, 2015.
3) Lee and Yoon, 2018.
4) Radnitz et al, 2013.
5) Loeb et al, 2017.
6) Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2019.
7) Styne et al, 2017.

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Healthy Eating for Preschoolers

Help your child build healthy habits by making the healthy choice the easy choice for everyone!

Did you know?

Childhood obesity is a major public health concern in the US. It affects children of all ages, including preschool children. About 14% of children ages 2-5 are considered obese.[6]

Risk Factors of Childhood Obesity[1-3]

- Family history and genetics
- High intake of sugar-sweetened beverages such as soda or fruit juice as well as fast foods, processed snack foods, and large portion sizes
- Low physical activity
- Emotional stress
- Unhealthy food environment

Children who are overweight may have a higher risk of developing certain health problems as they grow older including:[1-2]

- Type 2 diabetes
- Heart disease
- High blood pressure
- Sleep apnea
- Musculoskeletal disorders
- Asthma

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Healthy Defaults at Home

- Stock your kitchen with fresh fruits and vegetables to offer at meal and snack times.[4,7]

- Clear your kitchen of highly processed snacks including chips, cookies, or candy.[4,7]

- Make water or low-fat milk the default beverage option at mealtimes.

- Create a list of activities your child can choose from that doesn't include watching TV or playing games on a tablet. Screen time should be limited to 2 hours per day.[7]

- Offer regular meals and snacks. Avoid skipping meals so that your child is not overly hungry by the end of the day.[1,3]

Remember - Children learn from watching their parents eat.[2] Help them make the healthy choice by modeling healthy food behaviors in the home.

Healthy Defaults Outside the Home

- Keep your child's favorite healthy snacks on hand when running errands, going to the park, visiting friends/family, or going on other outings.[4]

- When leaving the home, bring a sippy cup or water bottle to have handy for when your child gets thirsty. Offer water instead of juice, soda, or other sugary drinks.[7]

- Consider enrolling your child in a community program or activity that promotes physical activity.[4]

- If able, take alternate routes to avoid driving by fast food restaurants.

- Create a weekly meal plan and grocery list to prevent buying unwanted or unnecessary food items at the grocery store. Include whole grains, lean meats, fresh produce, and low-fat dairy options in your meal plan.

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