

Extension

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Reducing Eating Habits of Sweet Snacks

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Why are we so fond of sweet snacks? Our taste preferences develop when we are babies. We are exposed to different foods at an early age and start to prefer some tastes over others.

Through the foods parents and caregivers serve and eat, we set an example. Young children often look to parents and caregivers to model the appropriate behavior. Children will eat the same foods that the adults have on their plate.

Preference for sweets is often related to the parents' attitude toward giving the child sweets and the availability of sweets in the home. Children whose parents eat sweets frequently are more likely to eat sweets than those whose parents seldom eat sweets.

Parents also reinforce a preference for sweets as a reward for good behavior or to comfort children. For example, offering sweets for eating broccoli or after a skinned knee.

Researchers have found that the amount of sweet snacks children eat is related to the amount of television they watch. The more television viewed, the higher amount of snacks containing sugar that is consumed.

Parents and caregivers can help children form sound eating habits. Reduce the availability of sweet snacks, replace them with snacks and meals that satisfy a child's need for extra nutrients.

Tips for Success

1. Plan regular meal and snack time; try eating and snacking at specific times during the day. Children and adults usually reach for sweet foods when they are hungry. Therefore regularly give food to young children at specific times. For example: breakfast at 7:00 a.m., snack at 9:30 a.m., lunch at 12:00 noon; snack at 3:00 p.m.; dinner at 6:00 p.m. Provide nutrient rich, low-calorie snacks.
2. Join children at meal and snack times. Eat together whenever possible. Have a pleasant conversation while eating. Parents and caregivers should set a good example for proper eating behavior at the table. Eating together helps children learn that eating can and should be an enjoyable experience.
3. When introducing new foods, it's best to start with small changes. Introduce new foods with an old favorite. Serve a new food at the beginning of the meal when children are most hungry.



4. Include a balance of healthy fats, lean proteins and carbohydrates in the snacks and meals you provide. Healthy fats can be found in avocados, nuts and seeds, natural peanut butter and olive oil. Sources of lean protein are fish, chicken without skin, lean meats, low fat milk, eggs and nuts. These substances can help maintain blood sugar so that the desire to consume sweet foods is reduced.
5. Adapt the tongue to eating foods low in sugar. Otherwise, it will lead to a lifetime habit of unnecessary snacking on sugar sweetened foods. Food and beverages high in sugar supply calories. However, these types of foods are usually limited in vitamins and minerals needed for growth and development.
6. Avoid offering food as a reward for good behavior. Instead offer hugs or time spent playing or doing an activity with the child. Children will remember the time you spent together rather than food eaten.
7. Limit intake of sugar sweetened beverages. Avoid fruit drinks and other juices that have added sugar or high fructose corn syrup. Offer reduced- and low-fat milk products for children over 2 years of age so that children get their calcium every day. Consuming sugar sweetened beverages may lead to extra weight and tooth decay.

Let's Talk:

Over time your children's taste buds will get used to lower sugar foods and find high sugar foods too sweet. Keep in mind that children can learn from the healthy changes you decide to make, if you explain what and why you are making changes. Many children can become long time champions of eating better if they are challenged to make a change for a short specified time period. For example, challenge children to eat low sugar cereal and/or drink only beverages with no sugar added beverages for one week. The reward for meeting the challenge could be an outing to the park at the end of the week for anyone who meets the challenge. After the challenge encourage the new low sugar foods by having them available and easier to choose than high sugar foods.

Recipe for Health:

Hummus

Ingredients:

- 1 can (15 ounces) garbanzo or other white beans
- 3 tablespoons lemon juice
- 1 tablespoon tahini (sesame seed paste or substitute tahini with peanut butter, another nutbutter, or even olive oil)
- ½ teaspoon ground cumin (Can substitute cumin with a mild chili powder)
- ½ teaspoon paprika
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- 1 clove garlic



Directions:

Place all ingredients in blender and process until smooth. Serve with whole wheat crackers or breads and vegetables
Options: Liquid from the beans can be added to the mix. Draining or using the liquid will affect the thickness of the paste, so go with your personal preference.

Recipe from Cooperative Extension Service, University of Alaska, Fairbanks, Sonja Koukel