

## Wellness Articles

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An archive of past wellness articles is available at <http://www.albertahealthservices.ca/9966.asp>

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**Proposed publication date:** April 24, 2017

**Content provided by:** Alberta Health Services – used with Permission from Apple Magazine, Spring 2017

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## Positive habits last a lifetime

When parents and other caregivers have healthy eating habits, that's what children learn.

The eating habits children learn in their early years (birth to six years) last a lifetime. From a young age, we start to learn about food and eating by watching others. When parents and other caregivers have healthy eating habits, that's what children learn.

Ellen Parker's two boys Henry, 3, and Oliver, 5, are learning about healthy foods and healthy eating. She regularly gives them foods such as smoothies with spinach and quinoa and she grates vegetables onto pizzas and into veggie burgers. "They don't even know that they're eating healthy food," she says.

Here are other ways to make healthy eating a habit in your family.

**Offer three meals and two to three snacks a day at regular times.** Knowing when they'll be eating next helps kids feel safe and keeps them from wanting to eat throughout the day. If your child refuses to eat during a meal and asks for a snack 20 minutes later, it's okay to say no. Simply let them know they need to wait until the next meal or snack time.

**Offer new foods often.** It can take 15 or more tries before your child accepts a new food. Try offering small amounts of new food at the start of meals when your child is

most hungry. Include food that your family likes to eat along with new food prepared in different ways.

**Offer choices.** Try serving your family a variety of colourful vegetables, fruits and other healthy food, and let your child pick their own food from what you serve. Encourage them to take small amounts at first, and offer more if they are still hungry.

**Think beyond a single meal or snack.** Once in a while your child may eat little or nothing at a meal or snack. This is natural. Over time, children usually adjust what they eat at other meals and snacks.

**If your child won't eat meat and alternatives.** You could offer different types of fish, poultry and lean meat. You may need to offer them many times and prepare them in different ways. Other tips: try soft meats such as ground meat or poultry, or dice meat into small bites that your child can easily chew. Meat can also be more appealing when you add it to soups, stews or tomato sauces. And you can offer other sources of protein such as tofu, beans and legumes, or fish.

**If your child won't eat vegetables, you can try these tips.** Add vegetables such as carrots, zucchini and beets to soups, stews, casseroles, stir fries or sauces. Cook vegetables to different textures and tastes—such as raw or lightly cooked.

If you're worried your child is not getting enough nutrients, talk to your healthcare provider. For more tips, visit [healthyparentshealthychildren.ca](http://healthyparentshealthychildren.ca). |a

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