

Children's Nutrition - Part 2
Healthy Foods Kids will Love
Dr. Deidre Macdonald, N.D.

Parents all want their children to be as healthy and happy as possible. We know that good nutrition is essential to achieving those goals, but getting children to eat healthy foods can be a challenge in a world of junk food. These tips will help your family to set up good nutritional habits that will help establish a lifetime of health for your children.

Drinks:

The only drink kids really need is water. I encourage parents to minimize the use of juice, as juice is high in sugar and not nearly as nutritious as eating fruit. A great way to get fluids into kids on hot summer days is to make herb tea, chill it and sweeten it with Stevia. A nice tea to try is Celestial Seasonings Black Cherry Berry (it has no artificial flavours). Stevia is a safe, natural sugar substitute that comes from a plant whose leaves taste sweet without having any sugar or calories. It is very concentrated so a few drops go a long way. Another favourite in our house is "Shrek Juice". It is a smoothie made with spinach, pears, soy milk, stevia and a touch of ginger. (Thanks to Zen Zero for the recipe.)

Fruit:

Whole fruit is rich in antioxidant nutrients, enzymes and fiber. Fruit juice, dried fruit and fruit leathers just concentrate the sugars and do not have the nutritional value of the whole, fresh fruits.

- It is a good idea to make fresh fruit readily available for snacks and "dessert".
- Popsicles can be made at home by freezing fruit smoothies. Try watermelon puree with blue berries floating inside!
- Smoothies can be a nutritious snack. Fruit, tofu, yogurt, stevia, berries all can be blended in your own unique creations.

Vegetables:

Many parents struggle to get enough vegetables into their children. Creativity and persistence pay; you need to keep exposing kids to a variety of vegetables to allow their taste buds to get used to them. Remember, kids love to eat vegetables if they are involved in growing them. Some ideas to incorporate more veggies into your kids diets are:

- Mash broccoli or other vegetables into spaghetti sauce.
- Celery boats filled with peanut butter, cheese, humous, or canned salmon or tuna.
- Melt cheese on cauliflower or other veggies.
- Put veggie dip out before dinner when everyone is hungry.
- Little princesses like Annie's raspberry vinaigrette as a pink veggie dip.
- Start dinner with a salad course.

Whole grains and beans:

- Brown rice has nutrients and fiber while white rice has very little. Make brown rice a staple in your house and the kids will never know what they are missing.
- Make brown rice more interesting by making a pilaf with nuts, chopped veggies, corn or peas, and spices
- Another nutritious whole grain to serve instead of rice is quinoa. It is relatively high in protein and best of all it cooks in 15 minutes. Quinoa is available at Edible Island whole food store in Courtenay.

- Burritos are a popular way to incorporate beans and rice. Just add salsa, avocado and cheese for a yummy dinner, or make ahead and freeze for a quick after school snack that the kids can microwave.

Nuts and Seeds:

Raw, unsalted nuts and seeds are nature's perfect nutritious snack. Having a bowl of trail mix on the counter will help your kids (and you) stay away from less nutritious munchies. Make your own nut and seed mix, because most trail mixes include dried fruit that is hard on teeth.

- Nuts and seeds are great on cereal to add some much needed protein to start the day.
- Energy balls – often made with almond butter and coconut.
- Sunflower seeds become sweeter and tastier after being soaked in water for 30-60 minutes.
- Nut butters are much better for health than peanut butter. Try almond butter, tahini, cashew butter or sunflower seed butter.
- Flax seeds are a great source of fiber and help ensure good bowel cleansing. You can sprinkle 1-2 tsp. of flax seeds (ground in a coffee grinder) on cereal, salad, or rice. Don't heat or cook flax seeds as the oils go rancid in the heat. My daughter delights in having "golden sprinkles" on her oatmeal.

Protein:

Protein is needed to provide the building blocks for growth and development. It is also important for stabilizing blood sugar. Often kids like to eat a lot of carbohydrates like cereal, breads and noodles. High carb meals result in a blood sugar roller coaster that leaves the brain fighting for fuel. Low blood sugar creates aggressive and impulsive behavior and is an often overlooked cause of attention deficit disorder. Having protein at every meal helps stabilize the blood sugar. When it comes to protein though, avoid the temptation to let kid's taste buds get accustomed to chemically laden, high fat foods like hot dogs and sandwich meats. Good choices include:

- Fish – the oils in fish are proven to enhance brain development. Salmon burgers are a great way to get canned salmon into picky eaters.
- Chicken and lean beef are fine choices.
- Eggs are handy when hard boiled. Have kids draw on the cooked eggs with crayon or you can write notes to them on the shells and pop the eggs into their school lunch.
- If a child chooses to be vegetarian, special care must be taken to ensure adequate protein from vegetable sources like beans, tofu, quinoa, nuts and seeds. If the child is not eating dairy for any reason, calcium must be taken as a mineral supplement.

In general I recommend children's diets also be supplemented with a quality multivitamin, a liquid calcium and a purified fish oil.

Now is the time to start your children out with excellent eating habits. Have fun with these ideas!

Dr. Deidre Macdonald is a naturopathic physician with a natural family practice in Courtenay. For information call 897-0235 or check out www.getwellhere.com.