



# 51 Great Eating Tips for Busy Families

Dr. Christine Wood, Pediatrician

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[www.KidsEatGreat.com](http://www.KidsEatGreat.com)

[www.DrChristineWood.com](http://www.DrChristineWood.com)

# 51 Great Eating Tips for Busy Families

## Christine Wood, M.D.

Here are *51 Great Eating Tips for Busy Families* that will help children develop healthy lifestyles. For more information, see my website at [www.kidseatgreat.com](http://www.kidseatgreat.com) or read my book, *How to Get Kids to Eat Great & Love It!* Follow me on Facebook, Twitter and Pinterest: DrChristineWood.

*Christine Wood, M.D.*

### Around the table...

- 1 Don't be a short order cook** for your children. They will learn to hold out for "their foods" (usually the less healthy "kid" foods) and will be even less likely to try new things that you have prepared.
- 2 Avoid battling** with your kids over how much to eat. Remember that the parent's job is to pick and choose what to offer; it is the child's job to pick and choose how much to eat. Respect their appetites. For those ultra-picky eaters, offer a bite or two of food on their plate and let them succeed with eating small amounts.
- 3 Keep offering foods** your child may have refused in the past. Especially with the toddlers, they may refuse a food one day and love it the next. Be patient and non-judgmental in your approach.
- 4 Show your own enjoyment** of eating healthy foods. Buy and try new fruits and vegetables that you might not normally eat. Studies show that kids will follow the mother's food preferences for food choices and most food preferences are set by age 2 to 3 years.
- 5 Don't bribe or reward with food.** Don't use food to try to change behavior. Instead use stickers or find some fun stamps to stamp on their hand or tummy.
- 6 Watch the portion sizes.** Studies found that giving young children meals that are larger than age-appropriate can lead to overeating. Offer small first servings and then offer second servings if they are still hungry.
- 7 Make every effort to have family meals together.** Although life is busy, this does encourage better eating habits. Studies found that teens who ate dinner at home were more likely to have a healthier diet. Find recipes and

ideas for better items for your kitchen at [www.kidseatgreatrecipes.com](http://www.kidseatgreatrecipes.com) site.

**8 Turn off the television** during meals and don't allow kids to snack while watching TV. Allowing children (and adults!) to eat with the TV on will usually lead to more calorie consumption.

**9 Have children and adults tell one good thing or one funny thing about their day** at the dinner table. Developing habits of talking about what is happening in their day helps to bring families closer. Don't use mealtime to argue or nag.

**10 For your picky vegetable eaters**, offer vegetables and fruits as part of the meals. The reluctant vegetable eater who eats fruit will get some nutritional benefits. Have them just touch, smell and then lick foods to get them introduced, then they may be willing to "taste" or take "one bite."

**11 Avoid being part of the "clean plate" club.** Respect their appetites and allow them to stop when they are full. Many young children will eat their biggest meal at breakfast or lunch – if that is the case, focus on offering the varieties of foods at those meals. Often dinner is their lightest meal.

### **In between meals...**

**12 Plan for snacks**, but don't allow constant grazing of food. Use fresh fruits and vegetables (carrots, celery with peanut butter, any fruits) as part of the snacks and use less of the processed foods choices.

**13 Don't use snacks to occupy bored** children and don't offer a constant array of snacks in the car. Kids will associate car rides or boredom with eating.

**14 Time the snacks** so they are not too close to meals. If after school kids are begging for food right before dinner is ready, offer them salad or carrot sticks to eat.

**15 Keep healthy food choices handy.** Have the fruits out on the kitchen counter. Cut up vegetables and have them front and center in the refrigerator in a fun container. Cut them up in fun shapes.

**16 Keep treat foods out of sight.** Keep candy in an area where they are out of reach for children. Foods that are out of sight will not be eaten as readily (by the children or the adults!).

**17** **If you buy bulk food or snacks,** break it down into smaller serving sizes in plastic baggies. We are more likely to eat more out of big bag of food, then when it is portioned as a single serving. Serve portions in a bowl or on a plate rather than allowing eating out of bags. Create a fun snack plate after school -- see ideas on Pinterest/DrChristineWood.

**18** **Make sure they drink plenty of water.** Juice and soda are empty calorie choices. When offering juice, make sure it is 100% juice and not just “high fructose corn syrup” with water. Recommendations are for less than 6 ounces of juice per day for ages 1 to 6 years old, and less than 12 fluid ounces per day for 7 to 18 years old.

**19** **Work on getting kids to get their “5 a day.”** If you offer a fruit and/or vegetable at every meal and snack, your kids will get their 5 a day. Ideally, half of all meals and snacks should be the fruits and/or vegetables.

**20** **Put snack choices in 3 groups:** Anytime, Sometime and Occasional. *Anytime* snacks would be fruits and vegetables, low-fat yogurt; *Sometime* snacks would be whole-grain crackers, cheese, nuts; *Occasional* snacks would be chips, cookies or candy. Make a list, post and make sure they understand when and how often it is appropriate to eat these snacks. If it is too close to dinner, tell them it is time for an *Anytime* snack. See my website, [www.kidseatgreat.com](http://www.kidseatgreat.com) for the “Go, Slow and Whoa Foods” colorful chart that can be printed and posted.

**21** **Use a smoothie as a healthy snack.** Put in a combination of fresh fruit (frozen berries, grapes, bananas, etc.), soy protein powder, fresh vegetable juices, or a few slices of cucumber or leaves of spinach and omega-3 fats and water in a blender to make a wholesome smoothie. Add a fiber powder and/or probiotics for extra intestinal support.

## Buying foods...

**22** **Avoid trans fats in foods.** These are the unhealthiest types of fats and can be found on labels as: “hydrogenated” or “partially hydrogenated” types of oils. Find better choices without these fats. If it has less than ½ gram of trans fats per serving, the nutrition facts label can still claim “zero” trans fats, so read the ingredient list to search for these ingredients.

**23** **Look for more whole grains in foods.** Look for “whole wheat” or “100 percent whole wheat” in bread and other products. Try amaranth, quinoa or whole wheat pasta. Add millet, quinoa or couscous to burgers

or meat loaf. Eat brown rice rather than white rice.

**24** **Have children go grocery shopping** and pick their fruits and vegetables. Ask them to pick a new fruit or vegetable for the family to try.

**25** **Add good fats to the diet.** Use olive oil or canola oil or coconut oil in cooking. Add omega-3s to yogurt, smoothies, or applesauce for a good dose of heart-healthy omega-3 fats.

**26** **Get to know popular brands** and read labels for sugar, fat and additives. Read blogs that can help you learn more like [www.fooducate.com](http://www.fooducate.com) and [www.kidshealth.org](http://www.kidshealth.org) article on reading labels at <http://bit.ly/2qSPTTg>.

### Eating out...

**27** **Avoid or limit eating out at the typical fast foods restaurants** (you know which ones I am talking about!). Find healthier fast food places that serve roasted chicken with fresh steamed vegetables for example. Ask to see the nutrition facts for the foods in the restaurant.

**28** **Share meals** between family members to cut down on portion sizes (and save money!). Add a side of vegetables or salad. Take home leftovers to use for lunch the next day.

**29** **Watch the soda intake.** Negotiate with your kids to make water or milk their choice. Many restaurants offer unlimited soda, so if they choose soda, set the limit to one. Sodas should not be an everyday treat, but a very occasional treat.

### School lunch ideas...

**30** **Cut sandwiches into fun shapes** with cookie cutter or roll them into “sushi rolls” and cut them up. Avoid processed meat choices with their nitrates. Health food stores often carry lunch meat choices without nitrates. Add spouts, avocado, lettuce, cucumbers, tomato, cranberry sauce, pesto, hummus or low-fat cream cheese spread with some herbs.

**31** **Other sandwich ideas:** Try organic peanut butter, almond butter, sunflower seed, soy butter or cashew butter with mashed bananas or fruit spread. For shredded chicken or egg salad sandwiches – add canola mayonnaise, grated carrots or zucchini, diced celery or apples, dried cranberries, pine nuts, flaxseed oil (source of healthy essential fatty acids), herbs

or parsley to the sandwich mix. Watch the tuna – there is concern about mercury in our tuna. See my website for more information under Mercury.

**32 Use tortillas or pita bread** and load it up with a combination of rice, beans, cheese, hummus or grated vegetables.

**33 Make a pasta, rice, quinoa or couscous salad** with olive oil or with a hint of flaxseed oil. Add any combination of grilled vegetables, tomatoes, herbs, parsley, shredded chicken, spouts, sunflower or sesame seeds, flaxseeds, pesto sauce, cheese, diced apples, celery or grapes.

**34 For snacks** at school try any fruits or dried fruits (warning: eating lots of dried fruits can promote tooth decay, but it helps if they eat crunchy fresh carrots or an apple after the dried fruit), nuts (warning: nuts can cause choking in children under 3 or 4 years of age, so use with caution), edamame, celery with peanut butter, carrot sticks with ranch dressing or hummus, pretzels (without the trans fats) or whole-grain crackers or bars.

**35 Pack water or 100% fruit juice** for a drink. Freeze the water or a small serving of fruit juice so it stays cold and keeps the rest of the lunch cold, too. Avoid the sugary juice drinks with “high fructose corn syrup” or the sports drinks. Make the water more interesting by freezing it with a slice of lemon, lime, orange, grapes or other fruits in it. Make fun ice cubes by freezing these fruits in the ice cube tray.

**36 Plan to use leftovers** from a healthy dinner for lunch the next day. Use a thermos to keep soups or chili warm for lunch. And remember to keep foods cold with an icepack for foods that need to be kept cold.

**37 Make healthy muffins** with ingredients like wheat germ, oatmeal, grated carrots, grated zucchini, bran or a fiber powder to pack for lunch.

## Fun food ideas...

**38 Dips can help your kids eat more vegetables.** Use low-fat ranch dressing or cut the ranch in half with yogurt. Try hummus dips or black bean dips for another healthy choice.

**39** **A healthy fruit dip** can be made with vanilla yogurt, honey (which has antioxidants) and cinnamon or nutmeg. Skewer fruit on a kabob stick for a fun snack. A small dose of dark chocolate also offers some healthy antioxidants.

**40** **Make your own sweet potato fries or zucchini chips.** Slice sweet potatoes into wedges or slices and drizzle with olive oil. Bake at 375 for 20-30 minutes until done. Slice zucchinis very thin and spray with canola or olive oil, season with a small amount of salt or other spices like cumin, rosemary or thyme and spread out on a baking sheet at 225 for about 1 ½ hours until crisp.

**41** **Quick dinner idea:** Buy a whole roasted chicken (preferably organic), shred it up and roll into a whole wheat tortilla with black beans, shredded cheese, tomatoes and lettuce for a complete meal.

**42** **Cottage cheese in an ice cream cone** topped with sliced almonds and fresh or dried fruit makes for a calcium and protein rich snack.

## Moving past media...

**43** **Teach children about the media and advertising.** They need to learn that the media and ads do not necessarily have their best interest in mind. Studies have shown that commercials affect kid's food choices.

**44** **Set limits on TV, computer, video game time.** The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends less than 2 hours a day of all of these combined. Try limiting to none or less than 1 hour on school nights. Encourage equal time being active for time sitting in front of a screen. See the coupon idea on my website to help manage weekly screen time.

**45** **Encourage kids to be physically activity.** Make sure they get at least an hour a day of sweaty physical activity. Schedule family outings – a walk, bike ride, or any favorite family sport and put it on the calendar.

**46** **Even on rainy or cold days,** kids can find active things to do in the house. Have them learn to use a hacky sack, play with an indoor nerf ball or make up a new dance with your kids. Dance, Dance Revolution is a physically active video game that some kids love.

## In your community...

**47** **Talk to the principal or teachers** about their Local Wellness Policy if they are a public school. Food rewards, vending machines, fundraisers and physical education are just a few things they can work on, especially with parent support ([www.fns.usda.gov/tn/Healthy/wellnesspolicy](http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/Healthy/wellnesspolicy)).

**48** **Talk to your sports team managers** about snack choices brought to team games. If policy is to bring fruit and find healthier choices, all the families on the team will find it easier to do. Check out my website at [www.kidseatgreat.com](http://www.kidseatgreat.com) for the Power Up for Sports and Health toolkit to share nutrition ideas with your youth athletic leagues.

**49** **Look around at your own workplace** and find ways to be healthier – start a pedometer program, ask for healthier choices if people bring in food, or start a lunch program where everyone brings in one ingredient to make a communal salad bar at lunch.

## And finally...

**50** **Add a multivitamin, calcium with vitamin D and omega-3 fats.** Kids today are overfed and undernourished and they are often not receiving even the basic important nutrients in their diet. There is increasing concern about vitamin D deficiency with kids and many children are not getting enough calcium in their diets. Omega-3 fats are an important fat and supports brain development and heart health. Find a pharmaceutical-grade vitamin supplement, my favorite being USANA's Usanimals™, Body Rox™ and add the USANA BiOmega Jr™ which contains healthy omega-3s PLUS vitamin D.

**51** **Remember that you are the parent** and the food choices you make and the way you eat will be modeled by your own children. We don't have to forbid the treats and candy, but we have to teach our children moderation. Also be aware about her own words about your body as we want to teach children to accept and approve of all body types and be happy with themselves. This teaching of a healthy lifestyle in food, activity and body image is something they will carry with them forever. Yes, they may rebel at times and we don't want to be the food police, but kids eating habits will be very close to how their parents eat. You are the parent!