

STAYING HEALTHY

READ THE SENTENCES CAREFULLY AND ANSWER WHETHER IT IS TRUE OR FALSE: -

- Watching TV while eating helps a child to sit down and enjoy the meal.
- There are too many food choices these days.
- It is important to drink a glass of milk in the morning before going to school.
- Childhood obesity has become a source of concern.
- Chocolate helps us to feel good after having a fight with someone or having received some negative feedback.

As a parent, you might have pondered over these sentences at some point. We want our children to eat healthy and yet may struggle to put it into practice. Being a parent today is riddled with challenges that were until recently unknown to mankind.

The fact is children these days are raised in an obesogenic environment- we may have walked to school, but now a child is driven even if it is a short distance; we played downstairs for 2-3 hours every day but today's children may not get enough time from their hectic schedules for playing. Back then, healthy food meant poha/ upma/ vegetable paratha; now children are served granola bars, cereals, Nutellatoast etc. Fast food chains and the explosion of food choices and cuisines have changed the traditional Indian diet.

Hence, for being mindful with our choices concerning today's lifestyles let's try and follow certain guidelines:

- **BE A ROLE MODEL:** -Eat healthy yourself! Choose nutritious snacks, eat at the table, and don't skip meals. Try to set a good example not just with food, but with activity as well, like going for walks, cycling, dancing together or just enjoy a simple sport to get moving! This will also help to improve the parent-child bond.
- **START EARLY:** - Food preferences develop early in life, as early as infancy or toddlerhood, hence offer variety. You may need to serve a new food a few times for a child to accept it. Try experimenting with textures, taste, colors and shapes. Cook the same meal for everyone. Ask children to help with your family's food shopping and meal planning and encourage them to take responsibility for preparing one healthy family meal a week.
- **ENJOY MEALS TOGETHER:** - Earlier, sitting together at the dinner table and enjoying a meal with the family was an everyday ritual. But with our fast-paced lifestyles, it has become difficult. Each one of us has a different schedule, different eating timings, different shows that we want to watch which determine our meal time. As a family, practice internet fasting at least once a week. Try having family meals at least over the weekend. Inculcate a habit of eating variety of food in children. Serve the same food prepared to every member of the family. Also, try avoiding TV and other electronic devices during meals and an hour before sleeping.
- **AVOID SUBSTITUTING LOVE WITH FOOD:** - Think of these common scenarios- When we visit someone, we may carry chocolates or chips for the children. As parents, we may use McDonald's or Dominoes as a means to reward their good behavior. By doing this, we are unconsciously influencing children's eating habits. Instead of using food to express your love, offer them hugs, praises and attention.

- **ENCOURAGE DECISION MAKING:** -“Finish all the vegetables on your plate and then you can eat the dessert.” Parents might find themselves bribing children to eat healthy food. A better strategy is to give them some control. Allow them to decide if they're hungry and when they are full. We may often insist that our children finish their plates so that they learn not to waste food. However, in doing so, we are unintentionally teaching them to override feelings of fullness. Give them smaller portions and give a second serving if required. Children won't go hungry. A child's favorite snack may not be nutritious; you can still buy it once in a while so they don't feel deprived.



- **EMOTIONAL EATING:** -All of us at some point have bad days, but not everyone uses food to get through them. Some behaviors and thought patterns can increase the chance of becoming an emotional eater. As a parent we need to be more receptive towards children's emotions and help them to express and regulate their emotions rather than using food as a coping mechanism.
- **IMPORTANCE OF HEALTHY EATING:** - Children can be at risk of not eating enough and not getting the nutrients they need for healthy growth and development. This may lead to fatigue, poor concentration, and loss of muscle mass and bone strength. Discuss with them about how food can help with concentration, school performance and their overall health and wellbeing, this can motivate them to make healthy choices.

Food is at the center of so many things that we do like. Food is part of our celebrations. Making food for someone is a way to show your care. Sharing food with others is a way to connect. So, it's natural to have an emotional connection to food!

Key to Healthy Eating: - Avoid any food that has a TV Commercial! - Anonymous

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