



Real Fuel: Using Food to Improve Well-Being

Get Your Child's Nutrition Out of the Red Zone and Into the Green

Car gauges, like oil or fuel, show where you are on a continuum. When you get to the wrong end of that continuum, you have a problem! The same is true when it comes to nutrition for your young children. You can't force them to eat, but you should be in control of what/when/where they eat.

Where do you fall on the nutrition control continuum?



In order to help your child learn to make good choices, you need to be in the green on the nutrition control continuum. Otherwise it's too easy to fall into bad habits because life is busy! What are three ways to start moving toward green?



Smart selections. The "where" can be a challenge, especially if you spend a lot of time in the car. So make wise selections! Pre-measure some snack bags for grab and go foods, like a cheese stick and some grapes, or dried fruit. Make sure your snacks contain protein and fiber, so that they create a sense of fullness for your youngster.



Stick to water. Let your child pick out his or her own water bottle and keep it full. Water is incredibly important for nourishing those young brains and bodies. Remember that juice is not fruit...it's sugar and water. There's nothing good in soda, ever. Gatorade may be what athletes drink, but your child doesn't need the sugar. Make water your go-to drink.



Make one meal. Many parents fall into the trap of cooking something special for their kids. Resist that temptation! You may choose to implement the "no thank you bite" or similar tactics, but make sure that you're all eating the same foods. When your child gets hungry enough, he or she will eat what's offered.



Is It Worth the Work?

Some kids will eat anything you put in front of them from day one.
With most of them, however, it takes work!

It's tempting to rationalize that what your kids eat doesn't really matter anyway.
But that's not what the research says.*



Better food can improve mental health. Depression and suicide are on the rise for children under the age of 18. Research has shown that a diet rich in fried food, sweetened desserts, processed meat and refined grains is associated with depression. You can help protect your child's mental health simply by reducing or eliminating these foods.



Better food means better academic success. Multiple studies have shown that students who eat processed and fast foods daily have the worst skills in math, reading and science. In contrast, children who eat fruits, vegetables and home-prepared meals have been shown to have higher IQs and better memory performance by age four! It's never too early to start good nutrition.



Habits formed today help prevent obesity tomorrow. Almost one-quarter of youth in Ottawa County are overweight or obese. When you teach your children to eat nutritious foods in response to hunger, you're helping them avoid bad habits, like eating from boredom or snacking on empty calories. You're empowering them to make positive choices as they grow older.

* If you want to read more, check out "Fast Food Genocide" by Joel Fuhrman, M.D. (available at Loutit Library or in bookstores)

Simple, Quick & Helpful Resources

Here are some favorite resources from parents who face the same challenges you do when it comes to nutrition and kids.

- realfoodcan.org: recipes, ideas, techniques and more.
- mylittleeater.com: ideas, tips, recipes for parents of babies and toddlers.
- kidseatincolor.com: classes and recipes focused on affordability and picky eaters.
- newwaysnutrition.com: tips and strategies for common toddler feeding challenges.

