

News Column – Donna Krug, Director and Family & Consumer Science Agent, Cottonwood Extension District

Raising Healthy Eaters

One of the most important responsibilities we have as parents is supporting the development of our children's relationship with food. For many, this is not an easy task. The environment in which a child learns to eat has a tremendous impact on how that child develops as an eater. When our three children were growing up, my husband and I tried to model healthy food choices. As a result, our kids, and now our 4 grandkids are eager eaters.

Hectic schedules, a dislike or inability to cook, or a distrust of food (too many carbohydrates, chemicals, etc) may affect the way families approach meals and have led to the following habits:

- Constant snacking. Let's face it; families are on the go and casual feeding has become the norm. Too often the food choices are initiated by the child, and consist of snack foods often made of refined grains. This constant snacking or drinking of high sugar-sweetened beverages can fill the child up, leaving them with no appetite for the family meal.
- Parental-controlled feeding. When parents either restrict or force their child's eating, destructive patterns can develop. Rigidly withholding the amount of food a child eats can backfire by creating food obsessions and lead to hiding food. This behavior stems from a child feeling insecure about when they will eat next, thus setting the child up to overindulge whenever there is an opportunity. Ultimately, the main goal should be helping children learn to love healthy food.
- Emotionally enforced feeding. Avoid using food as a reward, to soothe your child, to alleviate their boredom, or as a means to distract or punish.

One of the best strategies for developing a healthy eater is to set a good example. Your child will learn the most about eating by watching what and how you eat. It is important to prioritize your meals by making time to plan, shop, and prepare meals and also having a designated place to eat meals.

Additional strategies for how to raise a healthy eater will be shared in a free educational program set for Thursday, November 7th, at 5:30 p.m. at the Hoisington Public Library, 169 S. Walnut. I will be sharing an excellent fact sheet written by Crystal Futrell, an Extension Colleague of mine from Johnson County.

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