

just try it

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8 Little Bites Make Healthy Habits

March is National Nutrition Month and the theme this year is “Bite into a Healthy Lifestyle.” What comes to mind for me is that bites are a small part of a whole meal, just like small changes can improve your family’s health over time. People are usually more successful when they start with small changes and gradually make additional small changes over time, leading to big differences in the long run. I encourage you to choose two or three of these small “bites” for your family to try.



Healthy Habit #1: **Choose whole grains at breakfast.**

The U.S. Dietary Guidelines recommend at least half of our grain servings come from whole grains, so you will be off to a great start by getting 1-2 servings of whole grains first thing in the morning. For example, oatmeal, whole wheat bread, whole grain cereals, corn or whole wheat tortillas are all great options. Combine two additional food groups for a more complete breakfast. Such as:

- oatmeal + nuts + berries or dried fruit
- whole wheat English muffin + banana + milk
- corn tortilla + scrambled egg + grapes

Healthy Habit #2: **Add one more serving of vegetables to your day.**



Add vegetables to scrambled eggs at breakfast. Pack raw vegetables for lunch or afternoon snack. Mix vegetables into the dinner entrée or double the vegetables portion for dinner. These are quick strategies to sneak in an extra serving.

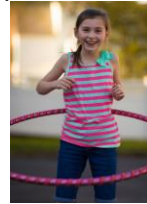


Healthy Habit #3: **Keep dessert portions to one serving.**

By reading the Nutrition Facts label, you can determine what is considered one serving. Get out the measuring cups to see what a single serving looks like and how close your portions are to the recommended serving size. This is a great strategy for teaching kids about appropriate portions and to help keep portions under control, especially for desserts and snacks.

Healthy Habit #4: Walk or play an extra 15 minutes each day.

Children and teens should get at least 60 minutes of physical activity each day and adults at least 30 minutes. Make the activity fun. Take a walk, play tag at the park, shoot a basketball, hula hoop or



dance in your family room. Ask your child for suggestions.

Healthy Habit #5: Make one meatless meal each week.

Americans consume an average of 8 ounces of meat per day, which is 45 percent more than the USDA recommends. By having some non-meat meals, you can reduce the risk of preventable conditions such as cancer, heart disease, diabetes and obesity. Additional benefits include decreasing your carbon footprint and saving water and fossil fuel resources used by the meat industry. For a wealth of recipe ideas and more information, visit www.meatlessmonday.com.



Healthy Habit #6: Drink more water.

Water is important for maintaining hydration, regulating temperature, transporting nutrients to cells and preventing constipation. Some studies show adults mistake thirst for hunger, meaning we eat instead of drinking fluids. So before reaching for a snack, ask yourself, “When was the last time I (or your child) had a glass of water?” The Institute of Medicine recommends that healthy people consume a total daily fluid intake of 13 cups for men and nine cups for women. Kids need anywhere from 5 to 9 cups per day and teenagers need 9 to 13 cups daily, depending on age, weight, activity level and air temperature. This includes all fluids, but the majority should come from water. One great way to meet fluid needs is to serve milk at meals, and water the rest of the time, including when eating a snack or when eating out. By avoiding juice and soda, you minimize extra sugar calories while providing the fluid our bodies need.

Healthy Habit #7: Include a fruit or vegetable as a snack.

By always serving a fruit or vegetable at snack time, you increase the odds that your child will get a minimum of 5 servings of fruits and vegetables daily. I encourage parents to offer at least two different food groups at snack time. Examples include:

- string cheese + grapes
- vegetables w/ hummus + whole grain crackers
- yogurt + berries
- toast + banana
- apple + nut butter





Healthy Habit #8: Consult an expert when help is needed.

If you or your child want to lose weight, or you're confused about what nutrition information to believe, talk with your pediatrician or a registered dietitian to get the help and accurate information you need. Registered dietitians can help you by providing sound, practical, personalized nutrition advice to help you and your family be healthier. ■

Jill West, RDN, is an accomplished speaker and author of 400 MOMS: Discover What 400 Nutrition Experts Feed Their Kids. As a Registered Dietitian Nutritionist and Certified Health Coach with a private practice in Lafayette, she has worked with thousands of individuals and families helping them make healthy lifestyle changes that are practical and realistic for the whole family. Jill lives in the East Bay with her husband and three boys. For more information, visit www.400MOMS.com