**10 ways to teach your kids healthy eating habits**

Globally, 40 million children are obese, and the prevalence of childhood obesity is increasing in both boys and girls, from developed and developing countries alike. This is worrying, because nutritional habits in childhood have a major influence on diets into adulthood.

“While the full-blown effects of chronic lifestyle diseases aren’t always felt before midlife, the behaviours that cause these diseases often begin in childhood,” says Vitality dietitian Terry Harris. “The foundational years are a key time to help your child form the habits and attitudes towards food that will lower their risk of developing illnesses, like heart disease, high blood pressure, certain cancers, stroke and diabetes, later on in life.

So how can you teach your kids healthy eating habits? Here are 10 practical tips from Harris on how to become a healthy role model for your children.

1. **Show, don’t tell**

Children learn by copying their parents’ behaviour, so the first step is to lead by example. Choose a glass of water over a soft drink or fruit juice, or crunch into an apple instead of a packet of chips. Your kids will be more likely to follow your example and create healthy habits of their own.

1. **Shop together for healthy food**

Turn grocery shopping into a fun-filled family outing by exposing your kids to the variety of healthy food on offer at supermarkets. Teach them about colours, nutrition and where food comes from. Give them a healthy snack to munch on to keep them occupied, such as a tub of cherry tomatoes, a punnet of berries or an apple.

1. **Cook creative dishes as a family**

Teach your kids that cooking is fun. Cooking at home, more often, is a cornerstone of building healthier habits for both you and your family.

1. **Stock up on healthy snacks**

Kids get hungry often, so make sure you have healthy snacks around the house. Fresh fruit, nuts, vegetable sticks with guacamole, cottage cheese or hummus as dips and homemade popcorn make great snacks. Make a game of it – get your kids to create their own snacks using healthy ingredients.

1. **Let your kids decide what they like**

Treat your child like a blank slate; expose them to different food all the time and then ask them, what do you think? What does it taste like? Expand their food vocabulary beyond likes and dislikes to use all five senses, and let them make up their own minds.

1. **Love your fruit and vegetables**

Make fruit and vegetables a part of your daily life and show your kids how much you enjoy it.

1. **Limit sugary and salty foods**

Consuming too much sugar and salt can cause a host of chronic diseases. Train your family to taste their food first before reaching for the salt shaker and, where you can, replace added sugar with fresh fruit.

1. **Make fast food a fun game**

Everyone has days when eating out is the simplest option. Show your child that there are healthy fast food options out there. Turn deciding on dinner into a scavenger hunt with a prize for the family member who can find the healthiest takeout menu.

1. **Make food time family time**

In our fast-paced world, it’s important to teach children to slow down and unwind after a stimulating day. Do your best to stick to a routine of cooking and eating a meal together as a family, and remember to turn off all screens and talk to each other instead.

1. **Remove the word “diet” from your vocabulary**

Do your kids often hear you say, “I can’t eat that; I’m on a diet”? Children shouldn’t associate food with reward and punishment, or the idea that healthy eating is linked to deprivation. Remember it’s likely that your child’s inner voice will one day mirror your own, so model self-care and healthy attitudes towards food.

Try these 10 steps to encourage good eating habits in your kids, and your whole family will reap the benefits of a healthy lifestyle – both now and in the future.