

Meals Kids Might Eat: Advice from a Holistic Nutritionist

Contributed by Jyotsna "Jo" Sreenivasan
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Sometimes it seems like an impossible task to get my kids to eat good foods! They want candy, sweets, and McDonald's any chance they get.

Linda Kingsbury cooks with her niece, Dalia.

For this month's column, I interviewed a local holistic nutritionist, Dr. Linda Kingsbury, about how to help kids eat more nutritious foods. Many of you might know Linda as an herbalist, but she also has a PhD in holistic nutrition. She raised her son holistically and has helped families and children with nutritional problems. I learned a lot from Linda and I hope you do too!

J.S. What do you think is the major food and eating problem among kids and families?

L.K. Overeating and obesity. When kids come home from school, they snack while watching TV or playing on the computer. The kids tend to eat high-fat, high-sugar, and high-salt foods. Whole-grain snacks can make a difference here, but still you've got to be moderate about it. You don't want to become a natural-foods junkie either!

I recommend going as natural as possible—eating as close to the source as possible. Dried fruits and walnuts are better than a jelly-filled cookie. Walnuts contain omega-3 fatty acids, which can enhance learning. Those blue corn chips with sesame seeds are great—the sesame seeds supply calcium.

J.S. After school is a challenging time for us. My older son comes home absolutely starving and wants sweets. If we have those in the house, I give him a small portion, but he's still hungry! I give him fruits, and he still shouts about how hungry he is! How can he be hungry when I've just given him a bunch of food?

L.K. He might actually still be hungry. The foods you mentioned—sweets and fruits—both cause a spike of blood sugar and then a drop in blood sugar. After school, what he probably needs is protein and some fat, which can help him feel satisfied longer. Try to serve a snack with at least five grams of protein. (See Linda's list of good after-school snacks on this page.)

J.S. I've gone back and forth about whether or not to keep sweets in the house.

L.K. If you don't want to eat certain kinds of foods, it's important not to have them in the house. Make it more difficult to get them. At the same time, you don't want to "awfulize" certain foods! Don't say, "You can't have that because it's bad!" Then they'll want it even more.

Here are some things to try regarding sweets. Serve sweets with a protein source, such as nuts or milk. This can help offset the blood-sugar rush caused by the sweets. A glass of water can help you feel full too. Try to help kids be conscious of impulse control. Years ago, I learned the "three-bites" rule. With three bites of a treat your body can be satisfied, if you savor each bite. The whole family could split one of those giant Co-op cookies, for example. Kids need to learn how to say no, how to stop.

Craving sweets also can mean that you're trying to bring joy and pleasure in from the outside. Talk with your kids about what else you could do to elevate the mood and have fun.

J.S. Is there a better time of day to serve sweets? I've been doing it after school, but what about after dinner?

L.K. I recommend serving dessert after they've eaten a good dinner. That way they won't be so hungry, and can be satisfied with a smaller portion. And you don't have to have a rich dessert every day. Once a week is fine for a high-sugar, high-fat dessert.

J.S. My 8-year-old used to be really good about trying new foods, but as he has gotten older, he refuses to eat a lot of things. And his younger brother copies him! I know some families have a "one-bite" rule—where the child has to try at least one bite of every food. I haven't wanted to pressure my kids about eating, but what do you think of the one-bite rule?

L.K. You don't want to have too much rigidity around food, because that can cause problems. I don't think it's good to insist that children eat everything on their plates, for example. However, I see nothing wrong with the one-bite rule. My seven-year-old nephew is an extremely picky eater—I joke that he has only five foods he'll eat! So if he wants more of one of his favorite foods, we ask him to eat a bite of broccoli, or a bite of salad. You can also educate kids about what they're eating—tell them, "This has protein, to build your muscles. This has calcium, for strong bones. This vegetable will help you see better."

Linda's High-Protein After-School Snack Suggestions

- hard-boiled eggs
- yogurt cup
- celery and peanut butter
- sunflower seeds with dried fruit (the orange-flavored cranberries at the Co-op are fantastic)
- blue corn chips with hummus
- half a bagel with cream cheese and jelly (Linda likes Nancy's cultured cream cheese, which provides beneficial intestinal bacteria)
- cheese sticks (the Co-op sells both mozzarella and cheddar varieties)
- whole-grain granola and milk
- whole-grain bread or tortilla with a nut butter (such as almond butter or sesame tahini) and jelly
- quesadilla—corn tortilla with melted cheese
- cottage cheese and canned pineapple
- tuna fish on crackers
- dried fruit, walnuts, and dark chocolate chips—a small Dixie-cup-sized portion Jyotsna is a Moscow writer and writing coach.