



Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Partnership of Wisconsin

GRANDPARENTS CAN HELP GRANDCHILDREN DEVELOP GOOD EATING HABITS

Madison - We often stereotype grandparents as always spoiling the grandchildren by buying them candy and baking cookies. But most grandparents do many more positive things to help instill good eating habits in children, says a University of Wisconsin-Extension nutrition specialist.

"Remember that treats don't always have to be candy," says Susan Nitzke, who is also a professor of nutritional sciences at UW-Madison. "Associating less nutritious food with grandma's or grandpa's love is not something you want to get hooked into. Keeping a tempting bowl of fresh fruit on your kitchen counter for the grandchildren can be just as special."

The other thing Nitzke suggests is talking to your adult children about how they would like you to feed their children when they are with you. If you disagree about certain types of food for the children, it's probably best for the children if you respect and comply with the parents' decisions.

Nitzke says grandparents don't have to serve the same exact foods that kids eat at home. As long as choices are nutritious and consistent with the parents' preferences, you can introduce different kinds of food and expand the variety of foods that children are familiar with.

Nitzke says when introducing new foods or foods that children have said they don't like, offer a small portion and gently encourage them to try it. Offer a small positive comment if they try it, then move on so it doesn't become a big issue.

"Children sometimes use food refusal as a way to get attention or power," Nitzke says. "Many children refuse to eat certain vegetables or meat at home with their parents, but may be perfectly willing to eat those same foods with someone else, like a grandparent."

She adds that you may also have different mealtime expectations. Many older adults don't like to see any food thrown away, while some children think nothing of dumping half their meal in the trash. The amount that a child eats at any given meal may vary dramatically, depending on how fast they are growing, how active they are and how much they have been eating over the past few days. That's why it's best to serve small helpings and allow the child to have seconds. That way, the child's hunger determines how much food he or she eats, without wasting platefuls. Young children generally need the same basic proportion of healthy foods that adults need, but in smaller quantities.

The Food Guide Pyramid suggests six to 11 daily servings of grains; three to five servings of vegetables; two to four servings of fruits; two to three servings of milk, cheese and yogurt; and three to five servings of meat, fish, poultry, dried beans, eggs and nuts.

For preschool children, these daily amounts will average roughly two-thirds of what they are for older children and adults, but the daily intake of milk should be about the same, at two to three cups per day.

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