

PEDIATRIC CENTER OF ROUND ROCK
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HEALTH AND NUTRITION

For centuries investigators and doctors concentrated a lot of effort in describing and learning to prevent nutrient/vitamins deficiencies. Over the last two decades we all learned about cholesterol and saturated fats as the ones to blame for the main epidemics of the occidental world, heart disease and obesity. We learned to identify and choose “fat-free” diets and became proud of reading labels to discard foods with too much fat. The food industry rapidly caught up with the “fat-free” paranoia, knowing that those products not labeled as “fat-free” would never make it to your shopping cart.

Here we are, at the beginning of the 21st century, facing the fact that all our efforts gave poor results. What we used to call “adult onset diabetes” is now diagnosed in school age children, and preventing obesity in childhood is now the most challenging task for pediatricians and pediatric nurse practitioners.

At the Pediatric Center of Round Rock we are very aware of this responsibility and feel it is up to us, the medical professionals, to tell you what to do and how to do it to prevent the life long consequences of acquiring wrong habits at an early age.

I am not going to give statistics or unpractical data that you can find anywhere. One of the most effective ways to educate is in a one-to-one session during your health supervision visits, and we encourage you to ask for advice every time you see your pediatrician.

Here are some practical tips starting at the grocery store. Please realize that changing eating habits involves the whole family.

- 1- There is no nutrition value in the fruit juices. They are just water and sugar; even the most “natural” ones contain just the water from the fruit and the sugar from the fruit. Buy whole, “natural” fruits and offer them after each meal or as snacks.
- 2- The habit of drinking “sodas” starts in childhood, in a family who buys sodas for the adults in the house. Sugar- free sodas are not a good alternative; remember, we are trying to teach the child that when we are thirsty, we need water. Sweet water of any kind (sodas, Cool-Aids, flavored water) is not a good choice and should not be available everyday.
- 3- Any snack that comes in a bag is probably loaded with salt and/or carbohydrates. A bag of chips with lunch is not a good choice.
- 4- Avoid the snack and soft drink isles of the grocery store. This is the test: if every time you go grocery shopping you load from those two isles, I can tell you right now you are not giving your family good nutrition. If instead you see yourself in

the produce, meat, fish, pasta, canned good sections only, you probably know more than you think about good nutrition.

- 5- It is a good habit to eat only at mealtime. The reason is a practical one: we make the day more predictable and we can accommodate work/school time around eating times. But there is also a health reason: we know that adults who learned as children to eat at any time of the day and all day long, tend to eat high calorie snacks and tend to be obese. We recommend eating breakfast everyday, lunch and dinner, and an after school snack only. If the child is hungry when he/she sits down to it, he/she is more likely to eat the nutritious food we are going to offer at the table. If he/ she has been eating “gold fish” and drinking juice several times during the afternoon, refusing dinner wouldn’t be a surprise to any one.
- 6- Talk to your day care provider and after school programs about the quality or their snacks and question the need for a snack at a certain time of the day. Day cares won’t change their habits unless we, the parents, ask for a change. Snacks entertain kids, and they are often used to keep them quiet for a while. They are also low cost, when compared to nutritious food, that have a tendency to deteriorate if not eaten the same day.
- 7- Remember, kids don’t do their own grocery shopping. They learn to eat what we have available at home!

So, what can we feed our kids? You can get advice from your health care provider, from the American Academy of Pediatrics, The American Medical Association, etc,etc. The advice is always going to be the same. At the Pediatric Center of Round Rock we believe in practicality, and we think it is up to us to guide you with very specific suggestions. We are now working on a “cookbook” full of recipes from all over the world, and we take advice from our multiethnic population. Here is one of my favorite dishes that my kids love, along with some “snack” suggestions we should always have available.

Enjoy.....

MARTA KATALENAS M.D.

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BACK TO THE KITCHEN! A SAMPLE GUIDE TO HEALTHY EATING

This is a sample of a healthy meal that is easy and fast to prepare. Remember to plan your meals ahead, in order to improve the quality of the food you consume and to create exposure to healthier foods for your kids. A meal such as the one sampled here provides 3 servings of fruits and vegetables, in just one meal!

CHICKEN AND TOMATOES

Ingredients: - chicken thighs or legs, 2 large tomatoes, 1 small onion, 2 garlic cloves, Parsley, 2 small potatoes, Olive oil, - Salt to taste.

In a medium size pot put 3 tablespoons of olive oil and add the onion, cut in small pieces. When the onion is transparent, add the chicken, turning it often to make contact with the hot oil. Cut the fresh tomatoes and add them to the chicken. Crush the garlic cloves and parsley together in a mortar, and add it all to the cooking chicken. Finally, cut up the potatoes in small pieces and add them to the mixture. Add 6 ounces of water and let cook slowly until the chicken is done. As the tomatoes and potatoes become softer, their juices will mix with the chicken, creating a thicker broth when the chicken is done.

SESAME GREEN BEANS

Ingredients: Fresh green beans, Olive oil, Sesame oil, Sesame seeds, Salt to taste.

In a wok or frying pan put 3 tablespoons of olive oil and 1 tablespoon of sesame seed oil. Heat it on the stove and add the green beans, after cutting both ends off. Sprinkle in the sesame seeds and cook until the green beans are tender and slightly starting to turn brown.

You can also use frozen green beans, obtaining the same effect. They can be used directly from the bag, while they are still frozen. It will just take a little longer to finish cooking. Avoid canned green beans, some of the canned vegetables contain preservatives and/or sugar, and the flavor and texture of the canned vegetables doesn't mix well with the nutty flavor of the sesame oil.

WILD BERRY DESSERT

Ingredients: - Mixed berries, fresh or frozen, Plain yogurt, Macadamia nuts.

The quantity of each ingredient varies, depending on how much of this healthy dessert you want to make. For one serving, use 3 tablespoonfuls of plain yogurt, one handful of berries and one handful of nuts. All you need to do is blend the ingredients using a handheld blender or a regular blender. For a sweeter taste, add a piece of banana or apple.

HEB has a wonderful plain "Bulgarian yogurt"; it is smooth and has no sweeteners or preservatives. And it is made right here in Austin!

In the summer, use the frozen form of the fruit, for a refreshing snack or dessert that kids will love. You can find all kinds of frozen fruits in the "frozen fruits" section of your grocery store. Canned fruits contain too much added sugars and should be avoided.

Enjoy.. Marta Katalenas M.D.

GOOD AFTER SCHOOL SNACKS

- Fresh fruits.
- Raw vegetables.
- Yogurt.
- Cheese of any type.
- Nuts of any kind.
- Lunch meats (the low-salt, low nitrate kind).
- Whole wheat breads.
- Milk. Even chocolate milk.
- Tuna salad with bread or crackers.
- Pink salmon salad (just a can of pink salmon in water, mayonnaise, hard-boiled eggs and celery).
- Peanut butter and celery sticks.

LENTIL SOUP

Mix together two cups of dry lentils, one onion, two carrots, one leak, two pieces of garlic, a touch of fresh parsley and one small potatoes (all cut in small pieces) in a pot. Add cold water, 4 tablespoons of olive oil and one Knorr chicken bouillon. You can also add two pieces of chicken or your favorite sausage for more flavor, or just use the vegetable ingredients without any meat. Cook it all together, slowly for about an hour and a half and serve as a soup or use a “strainer” to make a puree. Small kids tend to like it better when they can’t see what is in it. You can also cut up a hard-boiled egg over the soup when serving it, for more protein.