First 5 Sacramento offers tips for healthy family eating this summer

Special to California Kids

Cooking with children, visiting local farmers' markets and planting a summer garden among the ways to develop healthy eating habits that last a lifetime

Proper nutrition in children ages zero to five can reinforce lifelong eating habits that contribute to a child's overall well-being and help them to grow up to their full potential with a healthy life. Most experts advise that you can often get children to eat more veggies if you start early by offering your older infant and toddler a large variety of vegetables, set a good example by eating vegetables yourself, offer a lot of choices, and mix vegetables into a food that your child already likes. First 5 Sacramento has compiled a list of tips to promote healthy family eating this summer.

Cook with Your Children

Cooking together can be a delicious learning experience for children and their parents. Children can explore new foods and learn about nutrition, not to mention develop math and reading skills as they measure and read directions. By following a few simple guidelines, you can make cooking safe and fun, and entice your children into trying something new:

- Invite your child to help plan a meal or pick a recipe (and keep a list of child-friendly recipes).
- Create a safe place where children can cook.
- Give preschoolers their own safe utensils.
- Eat your creation together and enjoy!

Visit Your Local Farmers' Market

Most fruits and vegetables have a special peak time of year when they taste their best and are most abundant, and the more recently they've been picked, the better they taste. Farmers' markets are great places for children ages zero to five to try new fruits, vegetables, and other foods. Visit your local farmers' market and you and your children may discover an exciting taste or flavor.

Plant a Summer Garden

Children learn a great deal from growing their own fruits and vegetables. To get started, designate a section of your yard as a place where your child can plant his or her own vegetables. Then let your child harvest the veggies and help decide how to eat them. Community gardens are also a great way to get involved in growing fruits and vegetables.

In addition to these tips, try to keep children on an eating and snacking schedule: breakfast, lunch, dinner, and two snacks. This helps them feel signs of hunger and stops mindless munching between meals. Make the kitchen off-limits unless it's time for a meal or a planned snack. Limit calorie-rich juices, sodas, and other liquids. To keep children hydrated in the heat, give them plenty of water and help them avoid sugary beverages that have no effect on satiety.

For more information about nutrition resources and programs for children ages zero to five, as well as the community partners that provide nutrition services and resources, please visit www.First5Sacramento.net or call First 5 Sacramento at (916) 876-5865.

About First 5 Sacramento

Research shows that a child's brain develops most dramatically in the first five years and what parents and caregivers do during these years to support their child's growth will have a meaningful impact throughout life. Based on this research, California voters passed Proposition 10 in 1998, adding a 50 cents-per-pack tax on tobacco products to support programs for expectant parents and children ages zero to five. In the last year, First 5 Sacramento distributed approximately $16 million a year in Prop 10 revenues to programs and services that meet local needs. Each county has a First 5 Children and Families Commission providing unique local services for that county. Surrounding First 5's include: First 5 Yolo: 530-669-2475; First 5 Placer: 530-745-1304; First 5 El Dorado: 530-672-8298.

Advertise in California Kids!

California Kids! is an events and activities guide for active families. It is published once a month by Valley Community Newspapers, which also publishes the Arden-Carmichael News, East Sacramento News, Land Park News and Pocket News.

It is distributed throughout Sacramento and surrounding areas.

California Kids! reaches those parents most likely to purchase products and services by targeting active families who get out and enjoy all that the community has to offer.

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