

One of our biggest nutrition problems is the super-sizing of many food and beverage portions. Research shows when children are served extra large portions of food, they tend to eat faster and consume more calories than they need. This tendency to overeat usually starts around five or six years of age – and can become a lifetime habit. Here are five easy ways to smart-size children's eating habits from the beginning:



Use the right size dishes.

CHILDREN NEED SMALL DISHES, cups, glasses, and utensils for several reasons. Child-sized portions look just right in small dishes: not too much to be overwhelming and not too skimpy to feel restrictive. Age-appropriate tableware is easier for children to handle and makes less mess when spills naturally occur.

Let children start with a small serving.

CHILDREN HAVE SMALL STOMACHS so they need small portions – not the super-size servings so common in today's restaurants! If small portions are not available, split the larger portions in half. Teach children to start with a small serving of each food and to have more if they are still hungry. Child nutrition experts recommend starting with 1 tablespoon per year of life (which equals 1/4 cup for a 4-year old).



Encourage a comfortable pace of eating.

EATING SLOWLY enhances our enjoyment of meals. More importantly, eating at a reasonable pace gives our brains time to register fullness and satisfaction. It generally takes about 20 minutes for messages to get from your stomach to your brain. Family meals, with lots of laughter and conversation, are the perfect way to create a comfortable pace of eating.



Get out of the eating-from-the-package habit.

EATING OUT OF A FOOD PACKAGE – bags, boxes, or cartons – can easily become a risky habit. It's hard to tell how much you have actually eaten and most people usually eat more than they actually want or need. The secret to smart portion sizes: Take a small serving; put it into a small dish, bowl or cup; then put the package away. Out of sight, out of mind.



Get into the habit of sharing at restaurants.

IN RESTAURANTS, even kids' meals can be two to three times larger than what most children need. Make a plan before you order and plan to share whenever you can. Sharing meals at restaurants is a great way to save money and calories too. You can also plan to eat half, and take half home: Ask the server to bring a to-go box to the table with your meal.

