

Feeding Preschoolers-- Don't Use the "B" Words

If you are like most parents of preschoolers, you have felt the angst of wondering whether or not your children's nutritional needs are being met from the foods they eat. Most well-intentioned moms and dads have resorted to some "B" words while encouraging their children to eat healthy, "begging, bribing, bargaining, badgering and battling."



The "B" words are not very effective. Sure, if children know they get ice cream for dessert they may eat peas. But children should never be rewarded or punished for eating.

Research shows that if you offer a child a variety of healthy foods, and let them choose how much of the foods to consume (even if it's none), the child will consume adequate nutrients over time. Sounds so simple! But there are a few details to keep in mind that increase your success with this strategy:

Offer only one new food at a time. Present it with familiar, or "favorite" foods, such as bananas or pasta. You may need to offer the unfamiliar food on several different occasions, before your child will decide to try it, and that's ok.

Do your best to ensure your child is hungry for the meal. Your child should have **3 meals and 2-3 snacks** at regularly scheduled times. Avoid letting your child graze on food or beverages (other than water) in between meals.

Eat healthy yourself! **Parents' food and beverage choices** are the most reliable predictor a child's eating habits. If your family needs to improve food choices, take it slow. None of us, children or adults, like drastic changes in our diet. Introduce one or two healthier items each week, replacing the less healthy foods or beverages.

Out of sight out of mind. Keep only healthy foods around!. Highly processed, high calorie foods like French-fries and ice cream can be "once in awhile foods." What is once in a while? Monthly? Weekly? Daily? As parents, decide in advance what your family expectations will be and follow through. Be careful not to create "**forbidden**" foods, as that can make foods even more attractive to any of us, especially children.

This strategy worked for our **First Lady Michele Obama** when she recognized her own family's food choices were becoming unhealthy. As she put it, "small changes can lead to big results."

