

Keeping Toddlers Healthy over the Holidays

Trying to keep everyone in the family eating well and not overdoing the treats during the holidays is always a challenge. It is especially hard with small children, as they do not readily make the connection between treats and health.

There are a few tricks that you can incorporate into the season that really work year round. Plan nutritious meals with a good base of lean protein, vegetables and some **whole** grains. This will hopefully fill up the family *before* they indulge in sweet treats, thus limiting their capacity for desserts. If everyone eats well 80-90 percent of the time, then the special treats should not be too much of a problem. If you are making a lot of the desserts yourself, incorporate fruits as much as possible and limit the amount of sugar used. A healthy sugar substitute that actually *prevents* cavities is a sugar alcohol called xylitol. It looks and tastes like sugar and substitutes in recipes in the same quantities, so is easy to use in baking. Xylitol is also safe for pregnant and nursing mothers and has been studied in pregnant women. The study followed the children to about six years of age and found that the mothers given xylitol during pregnancy had children with many fewer cavities than children from the control group. A word of caution—too much xylitol when not used to it may cause loose stools, so work it into your baking gradually. I have found that in baking, substituting a tablespoon of flour with raw wheat germ adds flavor and nutrition (B vitamins). Using whole grain flours in baking also adds to the nutrition and does not raise blood sugar as quickly as processed white flour.

By keeping healthy snack foods on hand to offer your toddler, they will come to understand that the healthy foods come first, before the treats. Fresh, raw fruits and cut up celery and carrots with almond or peanut butter or sesame tahini make good snacks. Keep whole grain crackers on hand such as RyeVita instead of crackers made with white flour and trans fats. Before parties or holiday dinners make sure that everyone in the family has a healthy snack before so that they do not arrive starving. That is the best tip for avoiding overindulgence.

Most kids like soups and it is easy to put lots of healthy vegetables in a soup with a good protein base. Include plenty of garlic and onions to help ward off infections and colds. For kids with texture issues, puree the soup in a blender for them.

Happy and *healthy* holidays to all.

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