

It is that simple. All you are doing is bringing your awareness to the present. The more you practice meditation as a discrete exercise, the better you'll be able to bring mindfulness into your everyday life. This practice will help you in immeasurable ways, increasing your sensitivity to your body's signals; allowing you to more fully taste and enjoy food; and helping you live in and appreciate the body you have. Meditation will support you in your quest to stop chasing the elusive goals of weight loss and the fantasy that thinness equals happiness. It will help you appreciate who you are and what you are doing in the moment.

Particularly in the beginning, the practice of meditation is difficult. Your mind wanders; one thought leads to the next, which leads to the next, and much time goes by before you remember to come back to the present. This experience itself can be quite instructive. It tells you that you don't need to take each individual thought so seriously. It's just a momentary thought and your mind will be wandering on to something else soon. Think about that the next time you feel driven to finish off that quart of ice cream. If you can just "sit" with the thought for a few moments, experiencing it in a nonjudgmental way, the drive may just dissipate—a clear sign that you weren't really physically hungry.

Help Your Kids Establish Nourishing Eating Habits, Too

Your kids also need support in developing a healthy lifestyle and feeling good about their bodies. Establishing good habits while they're young will help them grow up trusting themselves and without the self-hatred and weight obsession many of us learned early on.

Children learn most by mimicking what they see around them. Don't fall into the trap of thinking that taking care of yourself is selfish. The Health at Every Size changes *you* make will have huge payback for your kids' health and well-being.

Research finds that sharing responsibility with your child about what and how much he or she eats is the most effective approach, from infancy through adolescence.⁴⁰⁵ It's your job to provide enjoyable

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food and cultivate an atmosphere that supports pleasure in eating. It's your child's job to decide whether he or she wants to eat and how much. Since you will have less and less control over your child's exposure to foods over time, your best bet is to support him in honoring his body, learning how to make good choices, and taking care of himself.

Though kids have slightly different nutritional needs than adults, the same advice that works for you will also support healthy growth in your kids: *Enjoy a variety of real food, mostly plants.*

Protein Myths

Did you know that many green vegetables get more than 50 percent of their energy from protein, packing in more protein per calorie than meat and dairy? That even a low-protein vegetable food like a potato gets 10 percent of its energy from protein? That a low-protein processed grain like white bread gets 12 percent?

The dietary recommendations for kids are based on body weight, but approximately translate to 12 to 15 percent of total energy, so even these low-protein sources contribute a considerable protein punch. Assuming overall dietary variety (not just sugar!), when kids get enough calories they get more than enough protein to meet their growth needs.

Don't let the protein-pushers fool you. Americans err on the side of getting too much protein, rarely too little. Don't start your kids on that path. While growing bodies need proportionately more protein than adult bodies, nearly all unprocessed plant foods, including vegetables, beans, grains, nuts, and seeds, contain adequate protein to support healthy growth. Meat and dairy can certainly be a part of a nutritious diet, but it's no more necessary for children than for adults.

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Children—often even more so than adults—are easily seduced by the intense flavorings found in processed foods. When their diets are centered on processed foods, it dulls their ability to sense and appreciate more subtle and wider-ranging flavors, a trait they will carry on into adulthood.

Exposing them to a wide variety of whole foods when they are young will make them less interested in fast foods and processed foods. This isn't to say that they will lack interest in those foods entirely, but that they are more likely to achieve a healthier balance. Provide a variety of foods so they can choose foods they like and develop their own tastes.

There's no need to ban "junk food." Offer foods like candies, cookies, and ice cream—in moderation. Deprivation won't do anything except make "forbidden" foods more enticing.⁴⁰⁶

A vivid example brought this home for me. I was cleaning up after my then six-year-old son and his friend and found an empty cookie bag. My son acknowledged that he had taken the full bag from the cupboard and ate a couple. "But they ruined our play date, Mom. Miguel just wouldn't stop eating them and didn't want to build Legos anymore."

Cookies were taboo in Miguel's home. Apparently, the deprivation he experienced left him without the skills to set appropriate limits. My son, on the other hand, knowing he had access to cookies much of the time, could enjoy them—and stop. He could also enjoy playing and wasn't distracted by the food.

Research indicates that parents who restrict access to certain foods are actually more likely to have heavier kids!⁴⁰⁷ This fact makes sense: The kids lose their ability to self-regulate as a result of parents' interference.

Promising a child dessert if she eats her vegetables or encouraging a child to clean his plate can also contribute to developing unhealthy eating practices.⁴⁰⁸

What's the best predictor of whether or not your kids eat their fruits and veggies? Whether or not they like them! Put effort into tasty preparation and you'll see the results, though you might need to exercise some patience. Young children are often hesitant to try new things.⁴⁰⁹ This wariness is normal. In fact, there's even a

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scientific name for this: neophobia, or fear of new things. Pressuring your child to eat a new food can backfire.⁴¹⁰ The best strategy is to eat well and wait for your child to follow your lead. He or she might not like mustard greens the first time around, but may be more open after watching you enjoy it over time.

Eating together has many benefits beyond more nutritious eating.⁴¹¹ Studies show that the more often families eat together, the less likely kids are to smoke, drink, do drugs, get depressed, develop eating disorders, and consider suicide, and the more likely they are to do well in school, delay having sex, and eat their vegetables.^{412, 413}

Farm-Fresh Balsamic Braised Beets (Often a Big Winner with Kids!)

Peel beets and slice them into quarter-inch strips. Be sure to get hands and face as stained as possible. Add the beets, some balsamic vinegar, and a little brown sugar (optional) to a large skillet. Bring to a boil and allow the beets to brown lightly, then flip them to brown the other side. Reduce heat to medium and continue simmering, uncovered, until beets are tender. Add balsamic vinegar as necessary to make sure the liquid doesn't get too low. Serve alone or on a bed of sautéed beet greens with the concentrated sauce drizzled on top.

Beets also taste great when cooked in a roasting pan in a 400-degree oven.

Try, too, involving your kids in food preparation. It will heighten their appreciation of what they eat. Consider growing your own food, even if it's just an herb in a windowsill pot; visiting a local farm; or shopping, cooking, and planning meals together. Beets are much more enticing when your child sees one growing in

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a field, pulls the bulb from the ground, meets the farmer who planted it, and then tries the farmer's recipe for balsamic braised beets. Schools that help students follow food from the garden to the kitchen to the table, doing much of the work themselves, are seeing amazing results.⁴¹⁴

Keep in mind that children are not just “little adults.” Young children need to eat more frequently than adults given their high energy needs and less-developed digestive tracts. Three meals a day just aren't enough for them—at least not without a couple snacks in between. Be sure to have foods accessible between meals.

Structured snack times are more effective than grazing, and also help ensure that your child comes to the table hungry. By late toddlerhood, kids can already develop skills to control mild hunger and wait for a meal to be ready—and you can support them in further developing those skills. If your child is hungry, the food will taste better, and they will be more inclined to enjoy foods beyond their favorites.

Given our cultural fear of fat, you may be tempted to limit or withhold food if you have a pudgy kid. Don't. Kids of all sizes need to learn how to regulate their food intake. Pudgy kids will be feeling plenty of cultural prejudice. They don't need more hassling from you—they need your support. Better to shore up their self-esteem: Reinforce the idea that kids come in a wide range of sizes and that every body is a good body. Teaching them to appreciate, not hate, themselves will support them in making better choices.

Remember, it's about health, not size, even with our kids.

Summing Up

Now that you know how to integrate more healthful habits into your life, let's talk again about food. In the next chapter, I will show you how to reprogram your taste buds so that you are drawn to nutritious foods and, in the process, take another step along the path to Health at Every Size.