



# Change your child's diet, change your child's mood

BY DR. JULIE T. CHEN

I wish my kids would eat healthier. How can I help them do that? What should I focus on?

**C**HILDREN are malleable beings. Sometimes that means we have a handful on our hands, but sometimes that works in our favour. In the case of trying to help your kids adopt healthy lifestyle habits, this malleability can work in our favor.

There are a few areas of concern about your children's health that I think parents need to constantly address until their kids adopt the habit into their own routine. These include:

1. Eating vegetables at most or all meals
2. Making exercise a priority
3. Making sleep a priority
4. Avoiding processed drinks and foods

Many of my patients will give up on getting their kids to eat vegetables after they refuse veggies once or twice. In my experience, if kids are given a variety of options and different preparation styles, then they will then start to accept the vegetables. They may not love the vegetables, but they start to accept the fact that they must eat them.

I recommend keeping different vegetables in various dishes. However, if you feel like you've tried everything you can—and repetitively—but find that your children still refuse vegetables in a natural format, you may want to puree them into your sauces (like spaghetti sauce) so that they can get

the nutrients of the vegetables without having to taste the texture.

Next, you need to encourage movement and exercise as a daily habit, as well as making sleep a priority for your kids. As a family, encouraging outdoor or indoor activities that keep their bodies moving is a good thing. If they grow up feeling that being active is a natural thing, they are more likely to stay active as adults. Going for hikes and bike rides on the weekends and going indoor skating or working out with your kids are good ways for them to see how much fun exercise can be.

The saying "seeing is believing" is true for most healthy habits. If you want your kids to make sleep a priority, you need to do so as well. Many of my patients will set a "lights out" time in the house for every one so that their children can see how important sleep is. Many issues such as ADHD, mood fluctuations and stress can be tempered by a good rest. Sleep helps the body's ability to manage stress hormones, as well as to balance and repair neurotransmitters.

Finally, avoiding processed foods and



drinks is just as important as eating vegetables because what we eat defines how healthy you are. Even if you are eating a lot of vegetables, your body is still likely to be inflamed if you are eating refined and processed foods. Processed foods can put your kids at risk for any genetic predisposition they may have towards various diseases, so make sure you stock your house with healthy real food options instead of foods that come in packages, wrappers or tin cans.

You have to be a good role model because kids will look to you for what is normal behaviour. Keep that in mind the next time you are at the grocery store and deliberating on what to buy.

When it comes down to it, you'll never go wrong if you are doing the right things. Your body will benefit and your children's health will too. **Z**

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