

TIMES LIFE!

How chubby is your child?

It's best to start eating right young, says Norbert Rego

TWELVE-YEAR-OLD Nilay Shanbhag plays so much, his mother keeps wondering how to keep his eating patterns in pace with his age and activity, or compensate for all the energy he uses up. Foods rich in proteins (skimmed milk products, chicken, fish, egg), good quality carbohydrate (oat, barley, whole wheat) and good fat (fish, olive oil, flaxseed) are a must on her menu now.

Meera Dedhia's 10-year-old daughter is lactose intolerant and her mother has been searching for a menu rich in the nutrients she was lacking. Calcium rich foods like green leafy vegetables, sesame seeds, fish, and good quality proteins have helped.

Kids have nutritional needs that differ widely from those of adults. Appropriate nutrition at the right time is responsible for good mental, physical and emotional wellbeing. A child needs a balanced diet to prevent problems like obesity, weak bones and other disorders. "Whether you're grabbing breakfast before school or choosing a snack after a sports practice, healthy choices are a must for every child. Most children give in to the temptations of junk food and laze around with sedentary games and television. At that tender age, if the child is told to correct his habits, obesity can be averted," says Kinita S Kadakia, diet consultant.

"Conversely, kids who are physically active and who use up a lot of grey matter, can reach greater heights in both mental activity and physical sport with the correct nutrition," she adds.

"Babies require nutrition for physical growth. Breast feeding is critical here. The first four years are key for brain growth. Hence, foods rich in DHA must be part of the diet. Thereafter, children need a diet rich in proteins and calories. But avoid high fats and carbohydrate content to fight obesity. In adolescence, diet should be rich in iron and calcium," suggests Dr Nitin Verma, senior consultant-paediatrics, Max Superspeciality Hospital, New Delhi.

It's ultimately about influences too. Monarose Sheila Pereira, a children's author, says "Yesteryears' children's books have kids munching on scones, cakes etc. This builds up unhealthy eating habits. Parents shove some packet of chips or sweets in the children's mouth to pacify them. Eating habits are formed early in life." It's never too early to start eating right.

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Healthy eating

BREAKFAST | Get your child accustomed to breakfast. Vegetable and cheese sandwiches, cornflakes, porridge, oats, idlis, poha, upma, omlette-bread, French toast etc.

LUNCH | Mix vegetable pulao, stuffed vegetable parathas, stuffed dal rotis, vegetable tikkis with whole-wheat bread, chicken or fish sandwiches, make for good tiffin-box fillers.

SNACKS | Replace chiwda/wafers with fresh fruit, sprouted mung bhel, a fruit milkshake, dhoklas, idlis, etc.

DINNER | Dal, vegetables, grilled fish with fresh whole wheat rotis, pastas or rice are best.

(Inputs from Richa Anand, executive dietician, Dr L. H Hiranandani Hospital, Mumbai)



PIC: AKSHAY KULKARNI, MODEL: AADESH