

25 easy ways to boost their energy!

Fussy eaters, snacking habits and shopping pitfalls: Azmina Govindji has tips and tricks to sort them all out and help the whole family eat more healthily.

1 You're the boss

Start how you mean to go on. As a parent, sometimes it's difficult to be assertive with your child in terms of their food choices, as it's easier to keep the peace. Decide, perhaps with your partner, where you feel there is room for negotiation and where you absolutely have to set boundaries.

2 Start them young

Toddlers soak up information like a sponge, so this is a great time to teach them about eating well. Take them to the supermarket and let them choose a variety of foods (except in the confectionery aisles!).

3 Spark curiosity

From the supermarket to the kitchen – get young children to help put away the shopping. It all creates an interest in food and allows them to explore as they ask you the usual 'What's this?' type of questions.

4 Little cooks

This is a really important one: as early as possible, involve your children in preparing meals. This could be as simple as pouring sweetcorn from a can into a bowl or tearing lettuce for a salad. Make it as interesting as you can: for example, making pizza faces using red pepper, courgettes, olives, and so on.

5 Cupboard love

If you have a big enough kitchen, cooking while they play can also help to engage their interest. Rather than leaving them alone to play a game, you could involve them in the steps that you're taking to prepare

tonight's meal. Even if you think they're not listening, they're still absorbing.

6 All together now

Research shows that children who eat together with the family at a dining table are less likely to become obese. So it's well worth getting into the regular habit of sitting together as a family for evening meals.

7 Weekend watch

Registered dietitian Sian Porter says: 'Many people try to eat healthily during the week but have a tendency to relax at weekends nutritionally, throwing caution to the wind. A typical Saturday cooked breakfast has a saturated fat content of almost 34g – more than the daily recommended level for both men and women. Swapping butter with small amounts of margarine made from seed or vegetable oils can easily reduce your saturated fat consumption at the weekend. So can grilling your cooked breakfast instead of frying it, trimming the fat from bacon or having a tea cake instead of a Danish pastry.'

8 Sneak up on them

Make sneaky changes to your family's diet without telling them. Spread a thin scraping of reduced-fat mayonnaise on their sandwiches instead of butter: you get fewer saturates, fewer calories and even some omega 3 fat! Choose spray oil for stir-frying. If you love pastry, go for shortcrust rather than flaky.

9 Perfect guests

If you have a fussy eater in the family, invite non-fussy eaters home for tea. Your

children will want to fit in, so if their friends are eating well, they are more likely to eat better too.

10 Teatime tantrums

Be patient with your toddler. Many young children seek attention by throwing a tantrum over dinner. Often they won't eat, or ask for something else, and when you prepare something else, that's not good enough either. You could find yourself making two or three meals that don't get eaten. Be strong and don't give in. Unless it's something they have a strong dislike for, you will find they will eventually eat when they are hungry.

11 Stay single

Avoid buying multi-packs if you can. Have you noticed how quickly 20 bags of crisps can disappear when they're on view? It's economical to buy in bulk, but find creative ways of restricting the amount you all eat, so the 20 bags last as long as they should. Try storing a few in the kitchen cupboard and have the rest tucked away somewhere else.

12 Online sense

You may think internet shopping is more expensive, but how often do you buy unnecessary (often indulgent) foods when you are browsing through the supermarket aisles? You might be tempted by special offers, the smell of the bakery, or the well-displayed deli counters. If you shop on the internet, you can actually keep to the same list each time you shop and this can avoid extra cost and extra calories. ►►

13 Leave the leftovers It is natural to finish off the leftovers on your child's plate as you clear away a table. However, be aware that those extra mouthfuls are extra calories and they will eventually show on your hips! Try serving smaller portions or take a carrier bag to the dining table so that leftovers go straight into a rubbish bag, leaving you less time to have a munch on your way to the sink.

14 Add a little fibre Although very young children shouldn't have lots of fibre, it is useful to introduce high-fibre foods in small amounts as they grow. So choosing wholemeal bread, wholegrain cereals or wholemeal pasta in the family's diet are good ways to encourage them to get used to the colours and tastes of less processed foods.

15 Rainbow games Train your children to eat a rainbow of colours. The greater the variety of natural colours on their plate in the form of fruit and vegetables, the wider the range of nutrients. Make it fun by designing a 'rainbow' plate with satsumas, strawberries, kiwi fruit and purple grapes.

16 World cuisine Nutritionist Dr Shilpee Mehrotra suggests: 'Have a picture of the world on the fridge. Ask each member of the family to choose a different country every week and make a dish from that country with them.'

17 Invent a recipe When you're carrying out the weekly family shop ask your kids to choose a fruit, vegetable and fish that they have never tasted before (okay, so you may need to look up a recipe when you get home, but that could be fun too!).

18 Farm fresh ideas Visit a local farmers' market with your family and get your children to choose one food from each major food group: dairy foods, starchy foods, fruit and vegetables, meat and fish.

19 Balancing act Ask your kids to design a meal with three of the food groups and help them to cook it: this is an excellent way to introduce



them to the idea of balanced meals, with some meat or fish, potatoes and two vegetables, for example.

20 Healthy afters Teach your children that dessert isn't necessarily out of bounds: it just depends on the ingredients. Experiment with exotic fruits such as mango and papaya or soften bananas in a pan with a touch of melted butter and a splash of orange juice – delicious served with a dollop of Greek yogurt or scoop of ice cream.

21 Set the standard As a parent, you are a key role model. You play a vital role in determining your child's diet and future choice of foods. They learn more from what you do than from what you say. So be very aware of your own relationship with food and the non-verbal messages that you give out by the food choices you make.

22 Talk the talk Sue Knight, author of *NLP at Work* (£14.99, NB Publishing), comments: 'Whatever you want your children or family to eat, or not to eat for that matter, set the lead... and celebrate the results that the healthy lifestyle achieves for you.'

23 Focus on positives Pay attention to those times when you and your family do succeed in sticking to your eating plan, rather than paying

attention to when you don't. What we pay attention to is what we get.

24 Learn from the best Find yourself a role model, someone whose healthy lifestyle you admire, and find out how they do it.

25 Get moving! Last but by no means least – take every opportunity to get out and about, play lively games, take part in sports together, and be active with the children and ideally with the whole family. Being a role model in exercise and activity is great for you, and essential for them, and a key way to set up healthy habits for life. ■

About Azmina

Sweet's expert is consultant nutritionist and registered dietitian Azmina Govindji, who runs her own practice working with national organisations such as the British Heart Foundation, World Cancer Research Fund and the Diabetes Research & Wellness Foundation. Azmina regularly appears on TV, including ITV's *This Morning* and Five's *The Wright Stuff*, and has written 14 books, including *Healthy Eating for Diabetes* with Antony Worrall Thompson. See page 24 for a selection of recipes from her latest book and visit Azmina's website, www.govindjinnutrition.com, for more about her.