

Stop Using Food as a Reward

Many times parents offer food, especially sweets, as a reward for good behavior and achievements. So what's so bad about rewarding a child when he does something "right?"

More children are overweight than ever before. Children today are at greater risk for developing diabetes, high blood pressure and even heart disease—conditions that were unheard of in children years ago. As a parent, you play the biggest role in your child's eating behavior. It's important to encourage and model how to choose, eat and enjoy healthy foods.

When parents give food to children as a reward, they are teaching them to eat in response to a situation, not in response to being physically hungry, which can lead to overeating, eating when they are not hungry or eating to reward themselves. Plus, children's food preferences for sweets increase when sweets are presented as rewards or when they are given along with positive adult interaction.

Encourage Healthy Eating Habits

Serve a wide variety of healthy foods. Don't force your children to eat when they're not hungry or if they don't like a particular food. Don't get upset or worried if a child refuses to eat something. Try offering an item they don't like at another time, prepared in a different way. Don't offer a dessert as a reward for eating other foods. Keep portions small for young children.

Be aware of what messages you are giving to your children about food. Instead of praising your child for cleaning their plate, ask: Is your tummy telling you that you are full? Rather than offering a cookie to a child who is sad, say: I'm sorry you are sad. Come here and let me give you a big hug.

Healthy Ways to Reward Your Child

Try these non-food rewards for positive behavior:

- › Read a book
- › Play a game together
- › Make a trip to the "treasure box"—a special box filled with stickers, art supplies, jump rope, bubbles, sidewalk chalk, etc.
- › Go to the park or other favorite outing
- › Arrange a sleepover or play date with a friend

Additional Information

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