

Calendar

Do Sneaky Things with Vegetables

Get Kids to Eat Healthy Food and Love It

It's the parents' job to offer the food. It's the child's job to decide what and how much of it they're going to eat," says Christine Wood, M.D. "If you say, 'You need to finish that' or, 'Eat all of that,' you're drawing battle lines, where generally the parents will lose. I tell parents, 'You can force it into the child's mouth, but you cannot force the child to swallow.' I've had kids spit the food right back out." Is this pediatrician, who practices in Encinitas, declaring the Clean Plate Club defunct? "One thing parents needs to recognize is their control, and they need to learn to

assert it when necessary. But they also have to understand where that control ends."

LOCAL EVENTS

The 44-year-old Wood, who lives in Del Mar with her husband and son, has compiled her ideas about feeding children in *How to Get Kids to Eat Great & Love It!* "I got interested in nutrition on my own," she says. "It's not something we're highly educated about in medical school. I started thinking about it when I had my child 7½ years ago. I knew I wanted to create good eating habits for him. Now I've seen it work, so I wanted to share my ideas with other parents."

Historically, the sort of book Dr. Wood has written wasn't necessary. Fast foods didn't exist, and everybody was walking the proverbial ten miles to school. Wood feels feeding children today is an essential skill to be learned by every parent.

She offers guidelines, not edicts. "Your kid eats at the neighbors' house, and you can't worry about it. You have to live in real life. To say we never eat



junk could be detrimental." You don't want to create forbidden fruits.

One thing parents can control is timing — when food is offered. Don't offer snacks while children are watching TV or doing homework, Wood advises. Avoid giving handouts to fighting kids. Don't use food as a distraction. Instead of giving snacks to alleviate boredom or keeping your baby quiet, use toys or books. Avoid letting children snack in the car.

Parents can decide how much food to offer. Keep portions small. It's more likely, then, that plates will be cleaned. Estimated calorie intake for one- to three-year-olds is about 40 calories per inch of height, Wood notes. Don't worry about toddlers who get stuck on one food. "There is no harm in a 'food fad,' as long as it's nourishing." Pasta, fine; chocolate, not fine. If your child is a food faddist: "Do sneaky things with vegetables," like pulverize them and mix them with the favored food. Also: "Always place other choices on the plate with the food fad."

If your child begins a food strike, don't show your anxiety or concern. Stay neutral. As in other areas of behavior, ignoring it can often make it go away.

Do not coax or bribe children to eat. Neither punish nor reward. Here again, you risk drawing battle lines if you

engage them this way.

Don't become a short-order cook. Limit food choices to two or three at mealtime. "I had one mother who knew her daughter would eat those fish-shaped crackers," Wood writes in her book. "If her baby refused a meal, she would offer those." Soon enough, the crackers were the child's staple. She had figured out that by refusing her meal, she would get what she really wanted.

Wood, who will lecture in Encinitas this week, stresses that parents must be role models. "This has to be a family thing. If the parents are eating junk, it's going to be hard for the kid not to." Parents should examine their own habits and change them, if necessary. "She isn't above instilling guilt as a motivator. Though changes may be difficult to make, she wants parents to remember it's for the long-term health benefits of the child.

What Wood often tells parents, who are frustrated or overwhelmed, is to start by following just a few suggestions. Achieve some small successes, and move on to other goals.

If nutritional ideas are resisted by your children, Wood suggests asking your doctor to discuss them at your child's next visit. And if grandparents are often in charge at feeding times and ignore your wishes, bring them along,

too. "Sometimes hearing it from an authority can have an impact."

"I love starting with families when their kids are really young," Wood says, "because it's just so much easier. You just don't have the TV on. It's not a habit. That's how we've done it in my home, and it's not even a question. But obviously when you're dealing with older kids, where habits have been formed, you have to regroup and redirect behavior."

Even if teens are taught and understand what constitutes good nutrition, Wood reminds parents that some adolescents will engage in "nutritional risk-taking." This is a relatively new way to rebel, it is suggested, and Wood agrees. "You know, teens are going to find it wherever they can."

— Jeanne Schinto



Dr. Christine Wood

"How to Get Kids to Eat Great and Love It!"

Lecture by Dr. Christine Wood
Wednesday, April 25,
7:00-9:00 p.m.

The Well Being
270 North El Camino Real,
Encinitas

Cost: \$25/person; \$30/couple
(includes Dr. Wood's book)
Info: 858-626-6944

Local Events
page 71

Classical Music
page 86

Art Museums & Galleries
page 89

Theater
page 91

Pop Music
page 96

Movies
page 127

Restaurants
page 136