

Building a Healthy Lifestyle, One Step At a Time

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After a busy day at work or chasing a toddler around the house all day, parents can find the idea of preparing a home-cooked meal overwhelming. But even when you don't have time to prepare meals from scratch, you can still feed your children a nutritious meal that will taste good too!

In honor of National Nutrition Month in March, First 5 San Joaquin wants to offer all parents and caregivers the following quick and easy tips that will help every child grow up healthy. After all, it is the eating habits children learn when they are very young that will affect their health and nutrition for a lifetime.

Healthy Tips for Feeding Young Children:

- **Make food look good:** Children, as well as adults, eat with their eyes first. If the food looks good, your kids will want to try it. Be creative, like topping off a bowl of cereal with a smiley face using bananas for eyes and raisins for a mouth!
- **Get your children involved:** If children are involved in the food shopping and preparation, they are more likely to eat a healthy meal.
- **Make fruits and vegetables a part of every meal:** Children should consume five to nine servings of fruits and vegetables a day, with a single serving equaling the size of a child's fist. Incorporating more fruits and vegetables into your child's diet can be as simple as adding lettuce and tomatoes to a sandwich or offering grapes or other fresh fruit with every meal.
- **Watch what your kids drink:** Sugary beverages, like soda and juice drinks, can increase the risk of tooth decay. Instead, try serving water or milk.
- **Make healthy snacks:** Toddlers and young children eat frequent small meals throughout the day. Give your child nourishing snacks that will give them a burst of energy, like raisins, fresh fruit or vegetables.

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- **Build more physical activity into your child’s daily routine:** Eating nutritious foods is essential to your child’s health, but so is exercise. The U.S. Department of Health & Human Services recommends that children engage in at least 60 minutes of moderate physical activity on most days of the week. Make it fun by playing tag in the backyard or taking your child on a walk around the neighborhood.
- **Preparing healthy food doesn’t take long:** In the amount of time it takes to purchase fast food at a drive-thru – about 3 ½ minutes¹ – you can prepare a delicious, healthy treat for your child. Try these ideas for small meals that are low in fat, nutritious, and take only a few minutes to prepare:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Red, orange, yellow and green pepper strips 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fruit salad made with pineapple chunks, bananas, grapes and berries
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peanut butter and banana on whole-wheat bread 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Homemade gorp (“good old raisins and peanuts”) or trail mix
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Celery or carrots with peanut butter 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dried fruit
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guacamole with blue corn chips 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Turkey with lettuce and tomato in a pita pocket
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yogurt or cottage cheese 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cubes of low-fat cheese

For more childhood nutrition information or to find out more about First 5 San Joaquin’s programs and services, please call (209) 953-KIDS or visit www.sjckids.org.

About First 5 San Joaquin

Research shows that a child’s brain develops most dramatically in the first five years and what parents and caregivers do during these years to support their child’s growth will have a meaningful impact throughout life. Based on this research, California voters passed Proposition 10 in 1998, adding a 50 cents-per-pack tax on cigarettes to support programs for expectant parents and children ages 0 to 5. First 5 San Joaquin has allocated approximately \$25 million this year in Prop. 10 revenues to programs and services that meet local needs.

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¹ Quick Service Restaurant’s Annual Study “The Best In Drive-Thru”