

# FIT FOR KIDS

EIGHT-PAGE SPECIAL FEATURE



- **FOOD** What to eat
- **EXERCISE** Off the couch
- **RISKS** Be alert, not alarmed
- **WILLPOWER** Saying 'no'

COMPILED WITH THE HELP OF AUSTRALIA'S LEADING PEDIATRIC NUTRITIONISTS



# The fine art of saying 'no'

Parents and children fighting over junk food makes everyone unhappy. **Angie Kelly** asked the experts how to say no and still keep the peace.

**T**O THE childless shopper, they're supermarkets, petrol stations or newsagencies. To the parent shopping en famille, they are battlegrounds rife with colourful, sweet-tasting weapons capable of bringing on World War III.

Junk food is everywhere. In the corner store, in vending machines, at the train station, in cinemas, at the supermarket checkout and at home in the family pantry.

And what parent - even one with the healthiest intentions for their children - hasn't occasionally fallen victim to the might of pestering power? Especially if it short-circuits a public tantrum or a screaming match between you and your offspring. Who hasn't given in just for a bit of peace and quiet?

And in many ways, says dietician Sue Radd, caving in occasionally is OK. Once you're inside the shop or at the party or at the movies, it's way too late to stage reasonable peace talks.

"Don't wait until you get to the supermarket or wherever you are going and have a big argument," said Radd, director of Sydney's Nutrition and Wellbeing Clinic and author of the just-released *The Breakfast Book*.

"You really need to talk about this in advance. Negotiate with your children when everyone's in a good mood at home. Sit down and talk about it as a family, work out how much confectionery or snack food is acceptable to you in your week and when is the best time to have it.

"Make a family rule such as, 'Yes, you can have a chocolate bar once a week (or whatever is acceptable to you), not every time we stop at a service station or every time we go shopping or every time you see it.'

"Having this kind of food every time you're out is way too often and will definitely set children up for weight gain and future health problems.

"If you work this out as a family, then children know they can get what they want every so often and won't feel deprived."

Similarly, when you talk to your children about healthy food choices, never bribe, Radd said.

Instead, stick to making positive comments relating to what your child likes to do. For example, "This food will give you lots of energy for when you play your tennis game," or "This meal will really help you have healthy glowing skin." Keep talks in the "now" as the risks of heart disease and cancer way off in the future won't mean too much to young children, Radd said.

"If you bribe them to eat healthy foods, that will negatively reinforce those healthy foods," she said.

"Saying things like 'If you eat your vegetables you can have dessert' is really bad because later down the track they will associate having to eat something they don't like to get something they do like.

"The other thing that speaks

## SNACK FOOD FAT COUNTER

Grams of fat 1 teaspoon = 4g fat



## HEALTHY HAMBURGER AND CHIPS

■ Here's how to turn a high-fat, fast-food favourite into a homemade, low-fat healthy treat containing fibre, protein and vitamin C:

- Wholemeal bun
- Grilled beef patty
- Tomato
- Lettuce
- Pineapple
- No butter
- Barbecue, tomato or sweet chilli sauce
- Home-made potato wedges or thick-style chips made using canola or olive oil spray.



## WANT TO KNOW MORE?

■ If you have a question about what your children are eating, submit it to My Smart Eating Coach at the Dietitians Association of Australia website and receive a reply from an accredited practising dietitian.

■ Go to [www.daa.asn.au](http://www.daa.asn.au) and follow the links.

louder than words is parental role-modelling. An American study on five-year-old girls has recently shown that kids who have parents who eat more veges and fruit eat more veges and fruit themselves."

Dr Clare Collins from the University of Newcastle also recommends using positive psychology on children when talking about healthy food choices.

"Use praise. Catch your kids doing something right, that way you will reinforce that behaviour. We must learn to turn a blind eye to the bad stuff, ignore it when they don't eat their veges but praise them when they taste something you want them

to taste," said Collins, who is also a paediatric dietician at John Hunter Children's Hospital.

"You praise the behaviour you want to see and ignore what you don't want to see. Parents have to do that more these days because when you and I were kids there were no aisles full of frozen delights and supermarket snack foods or things we can now dial up or drive through.

"Our parents didn't have to learn the skill of saying no, it's a new skill for today's parents, and it's important to remember all of us thrive on praise. We must do that now with our kids."

## Teach your children well

**CHILD'S QUESTION:** Why should I eat healthy food?

**PARENT'S ANSWER:**

■ It will give you more energy for sport and to do all the things you love doing.

■ It will help you concentrate better at school.

■ It can improve your memory and help you do well in tests and exams.

■ It will help you have healthy skin.

**CHILD'S QUESTION:** Why won't you let me eat more chips, lollies

and fast food, like the other kids?

**PARENT'S ANSWER:**

■ Fast foods and lollies are not "everyday" foods because they are made of high amounts of things that are not good for your body.

■ They are made of too much fat, too much salt and too much sugar and that's bad because it can affect how you feel, how you look and how well you do your work at school and how you feel when you play sport.

■ The ingredients are bad for your health and can make you sick.