

Give your kids a healthy start to life

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Credit: Anna Langova/public domain

Every parent wants a healthy child and two world leading researchers from Deakin University's Centre for Physical Activity and Nutrition Research (C-PAN) say the key is healthy eating and active play, right from the start.

C-PAN's Associate Professors Kylie Hesketh and Karen Campbell developed the InFANT Program, which supports [parents](#) to develop knowledge and skills to get children involved in [active play](#) and eating

healthily from the get-go, to promote health and wellbeing.

"Parents want to give their child the best start to life and we know from talking to lots of parents that they still need basic day to day strategies that help them make healthy choices for their children.

"The earlier parents can start the better, but early childhood is really important as that is a time when healthy behaviours can be established.

"In these early years toddlers are hard-wiring their brains about foods they'll enjoy and physical skills they'll maintain across their life, and it's also a time when parents need support.

"We need to help parents and give them skills to make healthy eating and active play easy right from the start for happy, healthy kids," said Associate Professor Hesketh.

Associate Professor Campbell said that nutrition is one area that confuses a lot of parents and brings many challenges.

"Children learn their food habits and preferences very early in life so it's really important to help them get off on the right foot. The Infant Program is all about getting good habits set up from the start – so much easier than trying to change habits once they've developed'.

"We know that from the age of three years, food preferences are quite set. Children also develop really quickly over a short period of time and so what is relevant at one age might not still be the best option as the child grows," said Associate Professor Campbell.

Both researchers say that parents need support to find their way through the early years where healthy eating and active play habits for a lifetime are formed. They offer the following helpful tips for parents to promote

healthy eating and active plays:

Great healthy eating tips:

- Babies are ready to eat at around six months of age
- It is important to try and relax and embrace the challenges and the mess!
- Don't give up trying to offer your children foods they don't like – it typically takes 10 attempts before children will accept a new food
- Children model their behaviour on their parents so enjoy mealtimes together as often as you can and remember that if you show you don't like broccoli they won't either!
- Provide a healthy range of foods and let your child decide if to eat and how much to eat
- The more you fuss about food, the more they will fuss - so try not to make a fuss at mealtimes!
- Snacks are really mini-meals to give your child an opportunity to eat a variety of foods from different food groups such as vegetables, fruit, grains and dairy
- Colour Every Meal with Fruit and Vegetables and give your child the right idea about [healthy eating](#)
- Fresh, frozen or canned fruits and vegetables are all great choices
- Offer water regularly and ensure it is always readily available – take that water bottle with you wherever you go
- Avoid offering fruit juice, cordial, soft drink and other sweetened drinks

Great active play tips:

- Babies learn about the world by playing
- Crawling helps with brain development, visual skills, independence and exploration

- As your baby starts to crawl, challenge them with different surfaces and obstacles to crawl over
- Find some time for active play with your child each day. Playing with your child helps develop their brain and body
- Provide a range of active play opportunities and let your children decide which activities to engage in
- Television is not recommended at all for children under two years of age
- When the TV is off, your [child](#) has more opportunity to be off and running!
- Active play for toddlers is very important physically, mentally and socially and helps them learn how to interact and share with others, improve communication skills and self confidence

More information: For more great tips and information on healthy eating and active play for children aged 3 months, 6 months, 9 months, 12 months, 15 months, 18 months, toddlers (and even for grown-ups!) visit: www.infantprogram.org

Provided by Deakin University

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