

Six easy ways to encourage children to eat less sugar

January 11 2018, by Sophia Komninou



Credit: Monstera Production from Pexels

A new campaign from Public Health England is urging parents to [limit snacks for children](#) to two a day, and 100 calories a piece. The aim is to reduce kids' sugar consumption – according to [PHE data](#), children eat on

average 10kg of sugar every year, with about half of this coming from sugary drinks and snacks.

This is definitely an important initiative, but any parent will tell you that getting little ones to swap cereal bars for celery is no easy task. You could explain again and again how eating too much sugar can lead to health problems like obesity and tooth decay, but that doesn't mean children will fully understand why snacking on sweet treats can be a problem.

Though encouraging children to eat [healthy snacks](#) isn't as easy as clearing out the cupboards, that doesn't mean it's an impossible feat. Here's how to make it less of a labour.

1. Be creative

There are only so much vegetable sticks and hummus that anyone can eat before it gets boring, so you will need to get a bit creative with the snacks on offer. But this is not about going over the top with Pinterest-worthy creations either. [Bright colours](#) and interesting textures will do the trick, as well as pairing already [well-liked flavours with new tastes](#).

2. Stock up with different choices

Variety can help as well. Rather than just having single snacks to hand, get a couple of alternatives ready. Again, these don't need to be presented on a platter, the idea is to give them [the autonomy to choose](#).

Have pots of plain yogurt or fromage frais in the fridge, nuts and raisins ready to be scooped out in handfuls, or some oven roasted vegetable crisps with a small amount of dip waiting in the cupboard.

3. Avoid sugary drinks

Parents hear over and over that even seemingly healthy drinks can often hide numerous teaspoons of sugar in them. While fizzy drinks are generally regarded as the most unhealthy options, fruit juice and smoothies aren't [as healthy as they seem either](#).

Flavoured water and squash [can also contain sugar](#) so that leaves plain water as the best option for children to drink. Though many kids will say they don't like the taste, adding a squeeze lemon or orange, or infusing a large jug with mint and strawberries will help change their minds.

4. Don't forbid but do control

As research has repeatedly shown, forbidding foods makes them [even more attractive](#) for children. In fact, the power of forbidden foods is so strong, it has even been suggested that it [works on healthy foods](#), like fruit.

The occasional biscuit or chocolate bar will not jeopardise a child's eating health habits, so long as it is just one or two every once in a while. As a rule of thumb, try not to keep sugary snacks in the home, avoid offering them if the kids don't ask for them, and limit the quantity offered if they do. Explain to them why it is important to limit those foods, too, as teaching them about their own health will work better in the long run than just saying no without explanation.

Keep in mind that the 100 calorie recommendation is a rough guide to help parents quantify sugar. Nuts, for example, are a healthy [snack](#) choice but a portion size is often more than 100 calories.

5. Start thinking about meals, too

While snacks are easier to target through [public health campaigns](#), remember that reducing [sugar consumption](#) should be done holistically. If half of childrens' total sugar consumption comes from [sugary drinks](#) and snacks then it is obvious that meals account for the other half. Start thinking about moderating desserts after meals and sugary breakfasts as well.

6. Eat healthy as a family

Children learn from what they [see adults doing](#), so it is important that parents also make healthy choices. Research shows that children who participate in frequent family meals are [more likely to eat fruit and vegetables](#), and they have more [healthy eating habits](#) overall that [can continue in adult life](#). Apply the same rules to everyone in the family, and the [children](#) won't be the only ones learning a valuable lesson.

Kicking the [sugar](#) habit may be tricky to begin with, but following this simple advice will help make food a positive experience for you and your little ones.

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