Of course our children are smart! They learn very quickly what they like and don’t like. They learn from what their parents eat and what they give them. And we’re just learning how young they are when they start learning!

Three to 5 year old children were asked to choose between pairs of food items or pictures of foods. Some were natural, others had added sugar, added salt or added fats and oils. Does it surprise us that they mostly chose the sugary, salty, or greasy foods? The first adult food most babies get from their parents’ plates is French fries - greasy and salty with sugary ketchup on top!

When they were asked to match a food picture with the logo or brand, every child was able to match at least some of the foods to their correct fast food or food marketing company. When parents serve sugary, salty or greasy food over and over, children learn that their parents like these foods, and learn to prefer them too. When parents serve children red peppers or rice and fish, children learn to like those foods. Children whose parents eat hot salsa enjoy hot salsa too. Children will like sweets, but parents can start early teaching their children to eat healthy foods too!

Children who are offered only high sugar cereal will eat a lot more of it than if the choices are low sugar cereals. Children who are offered only low sugar cereals will eat less cereal and more fruit. That’s a good combination!

Children are young as 3 years old prefer Sugar
Salt
Fat.
And they know which brands of foods give them those flavors!

BUT: children offered a choice of low sugar cereals will be just as happy with them. And they are more likely to add extra fruit to the cereal.

Parents Are a Child’s First Teacher
Children’s Tastes Start Early, Parents Need to Start Early Too!
So, what should parents do?

- Keep several varieties of low sugar cereals in the home, and no high sugar ones!
- Don’t let the children decide which you will buy. You choose what to keep in the house.
- Read the Nutrition Facts box and pick cereals with less than 5 g of sugar per serving.
- Have some kind of fruit available for breakfast. It can be fresh (chopped strawberries), or canned (peaches canned in juice), or frozen (blueberries with no added sugar.)
- Children over 2 years old should have 2%, 1% or skim milk. Only toddlers between 1 and 2 years old should have whole milk. (That’s the jug with the red top.)
- Allow the children to choose which cereal they want, and which kind of fruit they want to put on it. If you only have one kind of fruit today, that’s okay. They can eat that one today.
- If children want to put a little bit of sugar or honey on the cereal, let them. Even if they add sugar, it’s usually less than what is all ready in the high sugar cereals.
- Carry this list with you to the store. Only buy cereal from the top half of the list.

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