Parents Are a Child’s First Teacher

Watch What They’re Watching, Then Move

How long has it been since you took a Saturday morning off to watch TV with your children? Do you know what they are seeing, in between the cartoons? Usually moms and dads are so busy with all the work of keeping a house and family going that they don’t have time to watch TV in the morning. But that’s when most children are glued to the TV set. Do you have any idea how many ads they see for foods then, and how much it affects what they want to eat? It’s scary!

Children aged 2 to 11 years spend an average of 3 to as many as 6 hours a day watching television. With that much TV time, they see about 5,500 ads for food each year. Over half of those 5,500 ads were for fast foods (high in fat, salt or sugar), for sugary cereals or cereal bars (more sugar), sugary drinks or candy. Almost all of them, over 90%, were for foods with little nutritional value. No wonder they’re always begging you for some new or different food!

Children, especially the preschool and elementary-aged children, do not know how to tell the difference between an ad and the truth. They don’t recognize that what’s on TV is not the way life really works. They don’t know what is good and healthy, and what is not.

The good foods they need to grow are not there. The good foods you make and try to feed them are rarely shown on TV. Fruits, vegetables, low fat milk and whole grains just don’t show up on TV! Talk to them and explain that just because it’s on TV does not make it a good food, a good drink or a good snack. TV food is make-believe.

Other reasons for concern with the amount of TV children are watching include the amount of time they spend sitting. For every hour that a child spends sitting in front of the screen ads from memory. Many of these unhealthy foods are promoted by characters from cartoons or children’s movies. Many of the ads offer ‘free prizes’ (but you have to buy the food, so they’re not so free), toys or giveaways. Many are connected to video games, or website games for the older children.

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their chances of becoming overweight go up. So do their chances of developing attention deficit disorders. And children who watch lots of TV often have a harder time learning to read, or are older before they learn to read.

LIMIT THEIR SCREEN TIME

What can you do? Limit the amount of time you allow your children to watch TV or play video or computer games. You can simply turn the TV off a few more hours each day, or you can make children ‘earn’ their TV or video game time by moving. For example, 1 hour of riding a bike might earn them half an hour of TV time. Or half an hour of playing basketball could earn them half an hour of screen time. The more active they are or the faster they move, the more time they can earn.

You can encourage them to get away from the screen and move by setting a good example too. Take them to the park to play while you walk around the park. Play soccer or basketball with them. Play tag with them!

Or, set up some games for them to play. For example a scavenger hunt could send them upstairs, then downstairs, under the table and behind the couch following instructions or looking for clues. The more active they are the healthier they will be!

Here’s a quick and easy Tortilla Pizza they can assemble and you can cook. If all they want is cheese that’s okay. But if you set out some little dishes of chopped vegetables, they might eat more. Encourage them to arrange the veggies to make a face or a design on the tortilla. Then you take charge of baking it. This will be more fun and more healthy than what is advertised on TV!

Tortilla Pizza

What you need for 4 people:
6-8 corn tortillas
2-3 Cups of pizza sauce (from a jar)
1 bar (8 oz) light cheddar cheese or part-skim mozzarella cheese, shredded
Various vegetables, such as green peppers, tomatoes, mushrooms, shredded carrots, onions, chopped broccoli, or canned corn, beans or peas

Baking sheet
Spoon

What you do:
Let each child take a tortilla and lay it on a plate. Spread 2-3 spoonfuls of pizza sauce on the tortilla. Sprinkle some shredded cheese on the sauce.

Let your child choose some vegetables and make a design on the cheese. For example they could use shredded carrots to make hair, corn kernels for eyes, a slice of green pepper for a mouth and a circle of mushroom for a nose.

When they are done decorating the pizzas slide them carefully onto the baking sheet.

Preheat the oven to 400° F. When the oven is hot put the baking sheet in and bake the pizzas for 10 minutes. While they bake you can make a salad too. Let them cool a bit so no one burns their mouth, then eat and enjoy.