

**- Children—nutrition**

## Shaping positive and healthy eating habits among children

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EVERY child needs sufficient food that is both nutritious and healthy, that is why it is important to track all the food that they consume and monitor their eating habits. Doing so will also help prevent malnutrition or even obesity at an early age.



Dietary choices made in the early stages of childhood play a crucial role in determining the future health of these children as they enter adulthood.

Those with weight issues may go on to struggle with serious health problems including diabetes and heart disease.

Parents, guardians, caregivers, and teachers are the earliest influences in encouraging children to adopt healthy eating habits. These role models are vital in teaching children on the effects of the food they consume and the benefits of nutritious food.

There is a commonly known adage that the first three years of a child's life are very important. Therefore, children must be introduced to various foods so that they can explore and get used to different tastes.

Children's eating habits can improve depending on their eating environment. For example, children who have meals with their families are more likely to consume more whole grains, fruits and vegetables. They are also more likely to keep their weight in a healthy range by not overeating.

Education on healthy eating continues when children reach school-going age.

This is where schools can

continue to reiterate the message of positive eating habits by implementing educational programmes. Periodic initiatives in this area will improve children's knowledge of nutrition and health, enabling them to consciously make wiser food decisions.

Another step schools can take is to introduce more healthy food options on the menu. Eliminate fried nuggets and sausages and replace them with potato salads or sandwiches. Flavoured carbonated drinks can also be phased out.

Unfortunately, the sad reality in our country is that many schools do not offer healthy food options during meal or recess periods. There are also often food stalls outside schools premises selling sweet treats like ice-cream and processed snacks.

Kids today are susceptible to these and it comes as no surprise then that Malaysia has the highest obesity rate in Asia. Without properly addressing the issue of healthy eating from young, this undesirable label will only continue to hover over Malaysians for years to come. It is time for all of us to pay greater attention to what our kids eat, be it at home or at school.