

Eat healthy -- your kids are watching

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If lower-income mothers want kids with healthy diets, it's best to adopt healthy eating habits themselves and encourage their children to eat good foods rather than use force, rewards or punishments, says a Michigan State University study.

The study, which appears in a recent issue of the [American Journal of Clinical Nutrition](#), is one of a few that focuses on the eating habits of low-income families. The results demonstrate that the mothers who led by example and persuaded, rather than ordered, their kids to eat their vegetables had kids with healthier diets, said Sharon Hoerr, MSU professor of food science and human nutrition.

"Mothers should stop forcing or restricting their kids' eating," she said. "They'd be better off providing a healthy [food environment](#), adopting balanced eating habits themselves and covertly controlling their children's [diet quality](#) by not bringing less healthy foods into the house."

Overtly restricting certain foods from a child when others are eating them at mealtimes can lead to unhealthy eating, she added.

Additional parental tips include maintaining regular meal and snack times, offering smaller portions of healthy foods and allowing the children to decide how much they will eat. And what about kids who'd rather play with their food or consume only junk food?

"With picky eaters, it's best to coax and encourage them to eat rather than yell at them," Hoerr said. "Other ways to get them interested in

having a balanced diet is to take them to the grocery store or garden, and help them select new foods to taste as well as allow them to help cook at home."

In continuing this research, Hoerr hopes to develop home-based and interactive educational materials for parents who want to encourage healthful eating.

Provided by Michigan State University

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