



NEWS RELEASE

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Nutrition Literacy for Young Children

Nutrition literacy is a person's ability to recognize and use their resources for food to provide their family with healthful diet and help them develop healthier food habits. To achieve nutrition literacy, a person needs to have a variety of experiences with food, not just eating it. It is important that your children start learning about food and developing positive eating behaviors when they are very young. Healthful food habits should be developed for a lifetime. Including your children in talking about what is to be eaten and how to prepare it will help them learn important life skills. The home environment is the first place that your children learn about food. Food is basic to every family member's existence. There is no stronger influence on your child's eating habits than your own food practices.

Start your children on the road to being nutrition literate by reading books to them that promote positive, healthy eating habits. When selecting books, you should consider how the author addresses specific nutrition related behaviors. For example, The Very Hungry Caterpillar by Eric Carles promotes eating lots of fruits and vegetables, Pancakes for Breakfast by Tomie de Paola encourages children to eat more whole grains, and D.W. the Picky Eater by Marc Brown encourages trying new foods.

Other ways you can build a positive environment for nurturing your children's nutrition skills and knowledge are to:

- Talk more about healthy foods with your children.
- Explore how other families eat and learn their eating habits.
- Show interest in your children's ideas about what the family eats.
- Recognize that your children can understand how food is related to health.
- Encourage your children to have a wide variety of experiences with food.
- Model healthy eating behaviors by preparing healthy food, eating a wide variety of foods, eating more fruits and vegetables, and trying new foods.
- Include your children in family routines associated with food: planning, meals, shopping with a grocery list, preparing food at home, practicing food safety, eating together as a family, and practicing considerate table manners.
- Explore nutrition related internet sites with your children. Many of these sites have interactive activities that will enhance your children's language development, computer skills, and nutrition knowledge. Tufts Nutrition Navigator has a great list of sites for both you and your children. Go to <http://navigator.tufts.edu> and click on "Family".

Source: *Nutrition on the Bookshelf: A Nutrition Literacy Curriculum Guide* written by Janice O. Harwood, UCCE Nutrition, Family, and Consumer Science Advisor.