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IT'S AMAZING WHAT KIDS WILL TRY: HEALTHY FOODS

Children learn habits, attitudes and beliefs from their parents and other caregivers, and that includes their willingness to try new and healthy foods. For National Nutrition Month[®], the American Dietetic Association and the Okaloosa County Health Department encourage adults to be role models and teach children how to appreciate nutrition and enjoy healthful eating.

"The most important thing you can do is offer your children as many new foods as possible, as early in life as possible," says registered dietitian and ADA Spokesperson Sarah Krieger. "It takes much longer to accept new foods when you are older."

"Involve your children in grocery shopping and meal preparation as much as possible," Krieger says. "Kids are more likely to try new things – especially fruits, vegetables, grains and dairy products – if they are involved in choosing and preparing them."

A survey by the American Dietetic Association Foundation showed parents have more potential to influence their children's behavior, including their eating habits, than anyone else. In fact, parents outrank sports celebrities as the person the child "would like to be most," according to the survey. By eating healthy foods and offering them to your children, you can give your kids opportunities to learn to like a variety of nutritious foods.

Having a healthy relationship with food is a life skill parents can teach their children, Krieger says. "When kids are in the kitchen with their parents, they are learning. Talk to them, especially young children: 'Now we are adding ... stirring... washing.' Make the meal preparations fun and interactive. Then, when your children are old enough to prepare meals on their own, they won't view time in the kitchen as a negative."

Kids can develop a liking for new dishes by researching recipe ideas. "Encourage them to go through cookbooks, or look online. There are hundreds of thousands of recipes you can search, and it makes meal preparation more real for children if they can find recipes themselves," Krieger says.

One final piece of advice for parents, Krieger says: "Offer healthy foods and eat them yourself, rather than lecture your children. Just do it, put a smile on your face and your kids will follow."

Helping children become and stay healthy is a primary focus of ADA and its Foundation. Visit www.HealthyOkaloosa.com or www.eatright.org for more information.

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