

Food Conversations with Kids

When it comes to teaching children about food and nutrition, the language we use in conversations is important. Traditionally, nutrition education is cognitive-based and abstract, which is not how kids think! Kids are concrete thinkers and understand concepts literally. Teaching a child about nutrients or warnings about the dangers of sugar will not change the food preferences a child has. They do not choose foods based on nutrients and health benefits.



Describing food as 'good' or 'bad', 'healthy' or 'unhealthy' is not helpful and can actually be counterproductive. For example, a child may think "this broccoli must not taste good if mum keeps talking about how good it is for my body". Or a child may feel guilt or develop a negative relationship with food if they are eating foods we have labelled as 'bad'. Instead of labelling food as 'good' or 'bad', we can describe it in a neutral way. Here are some examples of how we can use more useful language when talking about food.

Instead of saying...

You could say...

Bread has carbohydrate and wholemeal bread is better than white bread



Bread is a grain food can be made with 4 ingredients – flour, yeast, water and salt.

Avocado has fats that are good for your brain



Avocados are smooth like butter and have a big seed in the middle. They are yummy on toast or as a dip.

Cake is full of sugar and is bad for you



There are so many different types of cakes out there, what is your favourite kind of cake?

Broccoli is very nutritious



Broccoli is crunchy when raw, or soft when cooked. The stems of broccoli are quite sweet.



It takes kids time to learn what balanced eating is. In the meantime, as adults we can provide a variety of food experiences to help them learn about food enjoyment, balanced eating and body positivity. You don't need to be a nutritionist to do this!

Tips for food conversations

- ✓ Plan meals together, providing options and ideas and ask them to choose which foods they would like to put into their lunchbox
- ✓ Write grocery lists and go shopping together
- ✓ Talk about how food grows, grow some food together in the garden or show them pictures of what different fruit and vegetable plants look like
- ✓ Learn the names of different foods in a different language
- ✓ Practice maths with food through measuring and counting
- ✓ Cook together and talk about how to cook different foods

