



## NEWS RELEASE

March 2004

By Anna Martin  
Nutrition, Family and Consumer Sciences Advisor  
UCCE San Joaquin County

### **Parents are in Charge!**

As a parent, your responsibility is to buy healthy groceries and serve nutritious food to your growing children. Start by establishing a routine, even if it is difficult at first. This means a set time for breakfast, lunch, dinner, and snacks. Once you have a routine for meals and snacks, meal times are more relaxed. Most children are happier on a schedule and become hungry at regular times. You'll feel happier about your parenting job when the family has a routine.

So, be consistent! Children need a meal routine just like they need a bedtime routine. Plan for three meals and two snacks each day! Serve a vegetable or fruit at every meal. Fruits and vegetables are great for snacking too. Instead of rewarding your child with food, reward them with attention (hugs, kisses, and smiles) and playful activities. Avoid arguments about high-fat, high-sugar foods by not bringing them into the house. Leave the candy, soft drinks, chips, and cookies at the store. Serve water when your child is thirsty. Water is cheap and healthy.

Part of having a healthy family includes spending time together. The family meal is a great way for everyone to get together, have a conversation, and eat together. Serving meals at home requires planning. Before you do your shopping, sit down and plan your meals for the week. Make a list of all the ingredients you'll need to prepare healthy, balanced meals. When fatigue kicks in and you want dinner on the table fast, your menu is already planned and the ingredients are right on hand. Make sure to always include low-fat or nonfat dairy products, fruit, and vegetables. Limit the amount of processed ready to-eat-snacks you buy (such as potato chips or cookies). Prepackaged and processed foods are usually higher in calories and fats and often more expensive. For the price of a large bag of chips and box of cookies you can buy 2 pounds of apples or 1 pound of bananas or 1 pound of carrots or 3 pounds of potatoes or 1 pound of peppers

Parents are role models! Set a good example by eating healthy foods yourself! Buy and try new fruits and vegetables. Drink water between meals. Set an eating routine at home for your meals and snacks. Your children will learn by your good example. Don't expect your child to like something new the first time. Offer it again in a week. It usually takes several tries before children are willing to try new foods. Place a small amount of each food on your children's plates. Let them ask for more. Offer healthy foods. Your child soon learns these are the foods in your home and will eventually eat! For more information about food portions and Healthy Eating Tips for Kids read USDA's [Tips for Using the Food Guide Pyramid for Young Children 2–6 years old](#).

Source: National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. *Healthy Children, Healthy Choices*. [http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/tips/healthy\\_children.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/tips/healthy_children.htm)