

Non-Food Rewards

Sometimes food is used to motivate children. For example, a parent may make a child eat all of the meal before getting dessert or a teacher may give a child a candy for getting a question right. Rewards can be a good tool to encourage a behaviour, but over time, the goal is to reward children less and less so they learn to do it on their own.

Rewards should not be used to get children to eat certain foods. Doing so can put pressure on children and lead them to eat worse, not better.



Food rewards can lead to unhealthy habits because children may:

- learn to like less healthy foods more than nutritious foods.
- learn to use food to feel good.
- lose the ability to tell when they are hungry or full.
- expect to be rewarded for doing good things and not do it on their own.
- under or over eat

Alternatives to food rewards:

- Privileges—such as extra play time outside, choosing an afternoon activity, etc.
- Recognition—such as plaques, stickers, or telling others.
- Social rewards—such as attention, praise or thanks.
- Toys or gear—e.g. Frisbee, water bottle, etc.
- Point system—earn points toward a larger non-food prize.
- Fun activities – such as games, field trips, etc..

Written by the Public Health Nutritionists
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