Handling fast-food temptation

Does life in the fast lane mean your family winds up in the drive-thru more often than you’d like? Try these tips to work around the temptation of fast food—and help your child learn to make healthy choices in a pinch.

Tame the habit
Consider cutting back on how often you eat fast food. If you normally get it twice a week, you might drop down to once a week. Tell your youngster ahead of time so she doesn’t expect it as often. Explain that you want to eat better and that fast food is often high in fat and sodium.

Plan ahead
Let your child choose healthy snacks to keep in the car, such as nuts, rice cakes, and plain popcorn. You might also plan errands for after mealtimes, or have your youngster eat a nutritious snack at home before you head out. You’ll be less likely to stop for fast food if your family isn’t hungry.

Order carefully
If you do get fast food, choose grilled chicken rather than fried, a whole-grain bun or tortilla, and fruit or vegetable sides. Suggest that your child request toppings like mustard or extra tomato slices instead of mayonnaise or bacon. Idea: Share “sometimes” foods. Get a small order of onion rings for the whole family. Or ask for a milkshake with extra cups, and divide it up for dessert.

Make an activity pyramid

Creating and hanging up this homemade poster will motivate your youngster to fill his days with fun physical activities.

1. Have him draw a large triangle and divide it into three horizontal sections.
2. In the bottom part, he can write activities to keep him moving every day. Idea: Play outside with friends. Jump rope. Shoot baskets.
3. In the middle section, let your child add things that take a little more time. Idea: Organize a kickball game. Go for a hike. Visit a playground.
5. Suggest that he choose at least one activity from the bottom row each day, one from the middle every week, and one from the top once a month.
Read the cafeteria menu

“That sounds delicious—and nutritious!” Make a routine out of reading the school breakfast and lunch menus together to get your child excited about eating healthy foods in the cafeteria.

**Talk about options.** Encourage your youngster to spot familiar foods with healthier twists like pizza with turkey pepperoni or “zoodles”—spaghetti “noodles” made with zucchini. Discuss what makes them better for him (turkey has less fat than pepperoni made from pork, zoodles are a green vegetable).

**Try new things.** Which foods sound tastiest to your child? Maybe he’s excited about Monday’s macaroni and cheese or Friday’s fish sticks. What new foods is he excited to try? If items are unfamiliar to him, such as sloppy joes or chicken tetrazzini, help him look them up online so he’ll know what to expect. After he tries them, have him tell you which ones he likes best. Then, consider making them at home.

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A Thanksgiving helper

Growing up, I often joined my parents in the kitchen when they cooked, especially on holidays. I wanted my son, Chase, to be part of our Thanksgiving preparations, so last year I appointed him my kitchen helper.

I gave Chase jobs like washing fruits and vegetables, and I shared a “secret” family recipe with him. He loved hearing how my grandmother worked her magic to create delicious cranberry sauce. Together, we read her recipe, and Chase helped me make it. I even captured the moment with a photo of two smiling cooks.

At dinner, Chase was so proud when his aunt said the cranberry sauce tasted like Grandma’s. This year, he’s already asking if I have more secret recipes to teach him!

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Lighter casserole

Casseroles are a go-to staple on many dinner tables. Enjoy these healthier versions of two family favorites.

**Beef and rice**

- Cook 2 cups brown rice according to package directions. In a large skillet, brown 1 lb. lean ground beef. Drain the fat, and return to the pan along with ¼ cup each chopped onion, carrot, and celery. Saute the veggies until soft, about 5 minutes. Transfer the mixture to a greased 2-qt. casserole dish, and add 1 28-oz. can diced tomatoes (drained) and the rice. Sprinkle with ¼ tsp. pepper, ¼ tsp. salt, and ¼ tsp. paprika. Bake at 350° for 20 minutes.

**Tuna noodle**

Boil 8 oz. whole-wheat egg noodles for 8–10 minutes. Drain, and set aside. In a bowl, mix a 10.75-oz. can reduced-fat cream of mushroom soup and ½ cup skim milk. Add a 12-oz. can tuna (packed in water, drained), 2 cups frozen peas, 6 oz. sliced fresh mushrooms, and the noodles. Pour into a greased 2-qt. casserole dish. Top with ¼ cup soft whole-wheat bread crumbs, and bake at 350° for 30 minutes, until browned.