

Parents & Food Shopping

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Remember that YOU are the boss! The advertisers that want you to buy their junk would like you to respond to the demands of your children...however irrational. They often use cynical tactics to influence your children, and then use every trick in the book to ensure that your children control your purchases. Advertisers. Don't you just love them.

The following tips may help you to take control over your food shopping:

Talk to Your Children

Raise the advertising issue with your children. Explain to them that adverts are designed to make people buy things, and that they often bend the truth. Even very young children can understand that adverts can bend the truth. Explain to your children WHY the "free" toy is in the coco-pops, or why the sweets are positioned at the checkout. Encourage them to be cynical and discerning consumers from a young age! You can find some of the tricks used by advertisers on our website.

Give older children something to rebel against...explain how advertisers try to make mugs of us by using tricks to get us to consume. Nobody likes to feel that they are being controlled, or that their decisions have been influenced without them realising...especially teenagers! Appeal to your child's sense of individuality.

Try to educate your children about food. Explain which foods are high in sugar, fat or salt. As you learn more, share your new-found knowledge with your children and other parents.

Strategies for Shopping

Bring back shopping lists! Supermarkets love it when you shop without a list...they have a range of tricks to get you to make impulse purchases. Plan your meals for the week, make a list before you leave the house (go easy on the junk food), and stick to your list when you shop. As well as ending up with a healthier shopping basket, you will almost certainly save money. If your child asks for something that you don't want to buy, just explain to them that it is not on the list.

If your children are a nightmare to take shopping, constantly nagging and throwing tantrums when they don't get what they want, consider leaving them at home. OK, this may be easier said than done...but maybe you could work in partnership with a friend. You could mind their children while they go shopping, and they could mind your children while you go shopping on a

different day. Discuss this issue with your friends...you may be surprised at how many people are concerned about this issue.

Ideally, you want your children to become discerning shoppers, and they won't learn if they never go shopping. Involve your children in the food shopping...they can help to make the shopping list, and they can be sent to fetch items in the shop.

Don't shop on an empty stomach! You won't make rational decisions if you are hungry. If the kids are with you, make sure that they're not hungry either...this may help to tone down the "pester-power". Keep some healthy snacks (like dried fruit) with you in the car, or buy a bunch of bananas for your children to snack on.

Read the labels...try to gradually improve your product knowledge. Don't be afraid to be negative! Use phrases like: " look at the sugar in this stuff, it's pure rubbish, it will give us all toothache!"...Children will learn to enjoy criticising junk food.

Expose trickery at every turn. Let your children know WHY Shrek is appearing on the side of the breakfast cereal packet. "Look at that, how nasty, those people are using Shrek to sell junk to little children...poor old Shrek!".

Don't be afraid to take the lead. Remember, YOU are the boss! Advertisers love it when children call the shots...as parents, we have to remember that we are in charge. Don't be too dictatorial, and explain your decision to your children.

Give your children some choice - within boundaries that YOU set...ask them which flavour yoghurt they prefer, or if they want jam or honey on their toast.

Don't lie to your children! Some parents go over the top when trashing junk food. Far better to be rational and truthful. We don't need to lie, the truth is on our side.

Control the Larder

- If it's not in the house, they'll eventually stop asking for it. You may even find that when you stop buying things like fizzy drinks, your children will hardly notice.
- Make healthy food like fruit easily available. Have a house rule that children can snack on fruit whenever they like (except maybe before dinner time). Click on this link for more information on helping your children to eat more fruits & vegetables.
- Load up on the fruit and veg. Fresh may be best, but dried, frozen or canned fruit & veg are all good.

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