meals are a great time
to play FOLLOW-THE-LEADER

and you're the leader

Set a smart example. Sooner or later, kids will do as you do.

how a mother's devotion led to a healthy family

(AND LOWERED THE WEEKLY GROCERY BILL!)

"I grew up in a large family—eleven people in all. With eight brothers and sisters my parents had to be economical. Meals were always filling yet thrifty foods like spaghetti, and lots of it. Once in a while my mother would add a can of vegetables to the meal but we rarely ate fresh fruits or vegetables.

My son's pediatrician told me that eating habits are set by age five. That shocked me. I realized I had a huge responsibility. I wanted my child to learn healthy eating habits early so he would have them throughout his life.

I had never considered myself to have particularly healthy eating habits, but practically overnight I started buying and eating healthier foods. Sure, I could have served these foods to my son and continued eating candy and other old favorites. But I knew I couldn't keep this game up forever, and it just seemed easier to learn to like what I wanted my child to eat. Besides, not only did I want to set a good example, I wanted to stay healthy for my son, too.

Now most of what I buy is vegetables and fruit, yet remarkably my weekly grocery bill is less than my friends' bills. I don't buy the more expensive organic produce or produce that is out of season. We don't keep a lot of unhealthy snacks around either. And we don't depend on fast-food meals. I learned early that huge servings of meat and a reliance on fast-food meals add up to far more than my produce-heavy bill.

Others are amazed at how my children eat. Avocado sprinkled with garlic powder is always a big hit. The older children scoop it out of the shell with a spoon—the perfect 30 second snack. Salads are a favorite too when drizzled with a light touch of ranch dressing. Tomato slices are devoured when sprinkled with cheese and a little olive oil and vinegar.

Meal time is a peaceful time at our house because we respect each other enough not to comment on what others eat. I don't hang over them encouraging them to try this or that, or ordering them to eat more. I offer about five healthy foods on a plate and say nothing. Giving them independence to listen to their own body has resulted in children who eat just until they are full.

It's been a great investment: five years of healthy eating for a lifetime of not just healthy habits but healthy living. I never guessed I would also receive the extra bonus of learning to like healthy foods myself. I'm so proud of the way my children eat—and I'm proud of myself, too."

Virginia's Tips for Healthy Eating Habits (and keeping the grocery bill down):

- Set a good example by adopting healthy eating habits yourself.
- Offer a wide variety of fresh fruits and vegetables.
- Resist fast food meals and meals that depend on huge servings of meat.
- Offer healthy meals to your children and let them decide how much is enough.

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