

Sweets & Treats for Kids: Tips from a Registered Dietitian Mom

By Rabiya Bower, MHSc, RD, LDN

As a mom and a registered dietitian, you may think my kid only eats “healthy” food. While our family does enjoy a variety of foods, my number one concern is ensuring she has a healthy relationship with all foods, and understands “all foods fit!” We focus on lots of fruits and vegetables, but also have room for things like pizza, ice cream, candy, and much more! With summer right around the corner, I’m gearing up for more time outdoors and less time around our dinner table, completing homework and eating meals. Between the snack shack at softball games and the pool snack bar, my kiddo has a lot of opportunities to indulge. As a registered dietitian and a mom, here’s how I handle the deluge of sweets.

Our family uses [Ellyn Satter’s](#) Division of Responsibility (sDOR) in Feeding. In a nutshell, sDOR is the idea that caregivers are responsible for **what**, **when**, and **where** children eat, while children get to choose **how much** and **whether** to eat what you provide. sDOR works no matter how old your child is! We’ve implanted this method since our daughter was born and feeding her has been a joy. She loves a variety of foods (including roasted Brussel sprouts!) and we don’t face meal or snack time battles.

Here’s how sDOR works for my family: at any meal time, there are a variety of foods to choose from. Usually, I serve a starch, like pasta or rice; a lean protein, like chicken or fish; and one to two veggies. As the caregiver, I have already determined what is available, when it will be served, and where we are eating.

My daughter gets to choose which foods she wants and how much. We don’t argue about what she is choosing to eat or how much – that is in her control. Her appetite changes from day to day, and the amount she eats at any meal or snack reflects that. Because I determined what foods are available, I’m confident she’s getting good nutrition to grow!

For example, one weekend during a growth spurt, she ate five eggs in a row for breakfast – you read that right – FIVE! My husband cooked up one egg at a time, and she kept eating and asking for more. The next day, she had five pieces of toast! It felt like she grew five inches overnight. By using sDOR, I was able to provide her with nutrient rich food – eggs and toast – and she determined how much she ate. Was five eggs a lot to eat in one sitting? Definitely! But she was hungry!! And I know her nutrient needs were balanced out by a variety of other foods she ate that day and overall, that week. I often think of the alternative – what if I had stopped her from eating? She would have been hungry (and whiny!) all day, and her body would not have gotten the energy and nourishment in needed to grow and thrive.

Of course treats are a bit different – we don’t encourage her to have five servings of dessert in one sitting. Instead, our family thinks together about our day and determine where we want a sweet. We do include something indulgent every day, whether that’s ice cream with dinner, a homemade baked good after school, or an ice pop at the pool. We often visit our favorite local farm, and visiting there is a treat in itself (the extra delicious ice cream is a bonus). It’s important to note: while foods like fruits and vegetables are offered in unlimited amounts, our daughter knows everyone gets one serving of dessert.

This works for us and my daughter doesn’t feel deprived – she knows she’s allowed to have something sweet most days and doesn’t obsess or overindulge at birthday parties or other celebrations. Because she knows she’s in charge of eating how much of any food she wants, she’ll often leave some dessert on

her plate whenever she's full. Some days, she does choose to lead with the sweet, and some days, she refuses it all together! Overall, I know her diet is balanced and nutritious, and I know she's developing a healthy relationship with food, the best gift I can give her as a registered dietitian and her mom.

Interested in learning more about Ellyn Satter's Division of Responsibility? Check out the website [here](#). You can start this method no matter how old your child is. Be sure to [work with a local registered dietitian](#) if you need guidance.

Wish something like this existed for adults? You're in luck! [Intuitive Eating](#) is all about learning your body's hunger and fullness cues, and listening to them (and much more). More information on Intuitive Eating can be found [here](#).

Bio: Rabiya Bower is the program coordinator for the MS in Nutrition & Dietetic Practice Program at Thomas Jefferson University. She's worked for The GIANT Company, The Food Trust, Manor College, and WIC. She won the Pennsylvania Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics Outstanding Preceptor Award for 2020 and is one of four dietitians selected for the Academy of Nutrition & Dietetics Diversity & Inclusion Leaders Program. Rabiya is the Scholarship & Awards Chair for PAND AME 2021, and the Public Policy Coordinator for PhillyAND. She also volunteers with the mentor program for Diversify Dietetics.

In her free time, she loves have spontaneous dance parties in the kitchen with her daughter, test new fusion recipes, and review children and young adult books with strong Black and brown lead characters. You can follow her eating adventures @rabiyabowerd.