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# Help Your Child Develop Communication Skills

**Joe Pergola, Regional Extension Family Life Faculty**

A number of strategies can be used to help your children develop communication skills. Each strategy represents a way for you to be a good communication model. Some effective strategies are:

1. MIRRORING

If you can imagine looking in a mirror, you have the basic idea behind *mirroring* as a way to facilitate a child's communication skills. The adult simply mirrors or imitates the child's behavior (facial expressions, gestures, or body postures).

Mirroring is an especially important tool to use with children who are not yet using words. It gives a sense of importance to a child's action or gesture and allows a non-verbal child to be an active part of an interaction.

The action you imitate should be initiated by the child. For example, when holding a young child you might have several opportunities to mirror the child's utterances. If the child makes a sound such as "mmmmm" or "mamama," repeat or mirror the sound.

You can also mirror actions or gestures. Clapping hands or smiling are good examples of actions a child might initiate. If you frequently mirror a child's behavior and sounds, his interest in repeating those early sounds (which become the building blocks for more complicated words) may increase.

2. PARALLEL TALK

To use *parallel talk*, sit next to the child and provide a running commentary (much like a sports announcer) to describe the child's actions. Describe what the child is doing in short, simple phrases. Try to put into words her thoughts and feelings as well as her actions.

Parallel talk is useful because it attends to what the child is interested in, stresses familiar words, and introduces new words. Also, since a child's first words or word combinations that refer to favorite play activities, your descriptions of these activities may reinforce and motivate the child's play behavior as well as encourage the child to talk.

For example, if a child is unsuccessfully words such as “stuck”, “uh oh”, or “help, please” to express the frustration and/or desire for help that the child obviously feels. After you have given the child appropriate words to express the situation, offer assistance as you normally would.

Providing a commentary on a child’s actions may seem silly at first, but children usually enjoy the attention. With practice, parallel talk can become a normal and enjoyable part of your interaction. By putting the child’s thoughts and feelings into words, you are giving important information and helping to enhance communication skills.

3. SELF-TALK

*Self-talk* means describing what you are doing, thinking, or feeling. It is similar to parallel talk, when you describe what the child is doing, thinking or feeling, but in self-talk remember to describe your actions.

Your descriptions should be appropriate to the child’s level of interest and understanding. One- or two-word descriptions are probably best for children who are non-verbal; if the child already uses one-word phrases, a two- to three-word description is more appropriate. Children are often able to understand words that are slightly more advanced than they can use.

With self-talk, you give the child new words and combinations of words that she may imitate in time. Try to make your commentary as natural and interesting as possible. This attracts the child’s attention to what you are doing.

If you are preparing an art project, you might say: “time to paint”, “look at all the colors”, “red paint”, or “here’s the paper” and so on.

4. REFLECTING

*Reflecting* is a way to promote trying to retrieve a toy, you can give her communication skills in children who are already verbal, especially when they are just learning to make word combinations. Simply listen to what the child says and then repeat it back.

Your response should be almost exact replication of what the child has said, but you repeat her words using the correct pronunciation of the words and , as the children are ready, correct grammar.

For example: Child: “Widdle googie.” Adult: “Little doggie.” Child: “Yeah, my goggie.”

Reflecting does not mean *correcting*, so be careful to avoid disapproving tone of voice. Avoid using phrases like “no, that’s wrong” or “say it like this.” Instead, simply repeat what the child said, pronouncing the words correctly. Your encouraging tone will motivate the child to continue trying. The child will gradually learn to correct herself just from hearing your model.

5. EXPANSION

To use the *expansion* technique, listen to the child’s message and then repeat it in a more “mature” form. This teaches children new words and language structures, adds new information to the child’s idea, and perhaps clarifies what he is trying to say.

Here are some different ways to expand on the child’s message:
Child: “More.”
Adult: “More milk.”
Child: “Go outside now?”
Adult: Is it time to go outside?”

These examples show that the adult’s reply is slightly more elaborate than the child’s initial comment. In many cases, the adult also adds information.

Don’t expect the child to immediately imitate your expansions. Even if the child doesn’t repeat the words you modeled, you’ve given her valuable information about putting sentences together to communicate.

# Keeping in Touch When Distance Keeps You Apart

**Diana Converse, Family Life Faculty**

Many families find themselves separated by distance at some point in their lives. Job requirements, further education, career changes, military assignment and other situations arise where one person in the family needs to temporarily leave. Travel can actually improve a family's communication if they make a special effort. Daily communication is the process by which all family members convey their feelings, attitudes, facts, beliefs, and ideas.

May Dooley Burns, Assistant Community Education Director St. Paul Public Schools, has identified the five R's of family change during separation: roles, rules, relationships, routines, and recreation and celebration. Burns encourages families to work together to identify the changes, then evaluate them when the absent family member returns home. Potential problems can be identified and prevented before the next separation.

The following are some examples and suggestions that may be helpful during a family discussion.

**Roles** - How do the jobs and responsibilities change when one person is away? How do they change when the person returns? How are these changes helpful (or unhelpful) to the family members who are still at home?

**Rules** – Do the household rules stay the same or are they more lenient or strict when one person is away?

**Relationships** – How do relationships with relatives, friends, and even family members change when one person is absent?

**Routines** – Do daily activities continue at the regular pace or are special arrangements needed to fill the gaps of the absent person? What other changes are made in the day-to-day happenings of the family?

**Recreation and Celebration** – Does the family put rituals and events on hold until the person returns, or do they continue events without the family member?

Planning ahead can help the family decide which way to proceed. Which of these changes seem to create tension or difficulty when the absent person returns? During a time of family conversation, select one area of concern to work on. Decide how to make changes that are helpful to all family members and that continue to work when the family is reunited. Talking about concerns or problems may be the first step to strengthening your family during these transitional steps.

Research indicates that planning ahead helps to facilitate a successful homecoming. Keeping good communication, a positive attitude, and a strong support system will help to make the transitions of a family member coming and going easier for the whole family.

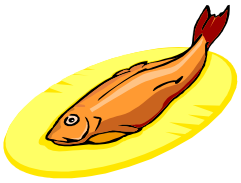
References:
Burns, M, *Parenting Alone Together…How Does Your Family Change? The 5 R's*, 1994, Family Information Services, Minneapolis, MN.

# Eating for Lower Cholesterol

**Mary A. Keith, PhD, LD, Foods, Nutrition and Health**


If you or anyone you know are on medications to lower blood cholesterol, you've probably been given a list of foods to avoid: No eggs, no bacon, no fat, no hot dogs.... But were you told what else to eat instead? Our medical choices to lower cholesterol are getting so powerful that often doctors prefer to prescribe a drug, rather than tell us to stop eating fat and cholesterol, and let the medication do the work.

Sometimes the drugs alone do reduce our cholesterol enough, but sometimes we, or the doctor, are left wishing it would go lower. Now researchers at Stanford University are showing that avoiding the fatty foods might not be the most important part of a diet. Maybe increasing some other foods will make a bigger difference.



They started with a small group, only 120 people. Half of them ate a normal American diet but avoided foods with saturated fats and cholesterol. For example, they substituted turkey luncheon meats for regular, ate reduced-fat cheese and frozen meals. Regular sugary snacks were allowed.

The other half ate large amounts of vegetables, fruits, beans and peas. They increased the amounts of whole grains, ate whole grain cereals, and lots of vegetable soups.

Both groups had the same total amounts of fat and cholesterol in their diets. They were encouraged to keep their weight the same, and to not change their usual exercise patterns.

After one month both groups had lowered their cholesterol levels. But the plant-based group had lowered it twice as much! Both the total cholesterol and the LDL or 'bad' cholesterol levels had gone down almost 10% in the group eating more plant products. The low-fat regular diet people lowered theirs not quite 5%.

These were *not* vegetarian diets. **They were *plant-based*. That means that the main ingredients of the meals were whole grains, vegetables, beans, fruits, nuts and seeds.**

Some **grains**, oatmeal and barley in particular, are known to help lower cholesterol. The oils in **walnuts and almonds** help lower cholesterol. Fish with lots of omega-3 fatty acids **(tuna, salmon, sardines, mackerel**) help fight heart disease. But they need to be part of an overall healthy diet.

Simply sprinkling some nuts on top of a salad loaded with high-fat cheese and salad dressing does not make it a healthy salad. Adding walnuts to pancakes slathered in butter and syrup won't reduce the calories.

As you work on increasing the healthy things, take more and more of the less-healthy foods out of your shopping cart. More beans, fewer burgers. More fish, fewer fries. More whole grains, fewer greasy sauces. And keep increasing the variety of fruits and vegetables. Put a rainbow on your plate and your heart will be happier!

# Portable Generators

## Lisa Leslie

A portable generator can be a valuable tool when the community power supply goes down. It can also be a hazard if not used correctly. The three deadly hazards associated with generators are carbon monoxide poisoning, electric shock, and fire. This article will discuss some of the things to consider before and after powering up your portable generator to avoid those hazards.

**Is your generator big enough?**
The amount of power a generator can supply is rated in terms of wattage. To figure out which appliances your generator can power simultaneously you need to calculate the total wattage for those appliances. Keep in mind that appliances with motors, such as refrigerators and air conditioners, will have run wattage and start up wattage. The start up wattage will be higher. That start up wattage number is the one you should use when you are calculating the total wattage required for the appliance.

The generator's voltage rating must also match the voltage ratings of the items you want to operate. Portable generators may be rated for 120 volts only or a combination of 120 and 240 volts. Most household appliances are rated at 120 volts. Some larger electric appliances, such as ranges and dryers, are rated at 240 volts. These appliances cannot be operated on a 120-volt generator.

**Backfeed can be deadly**
Backfeed occurs when a generator is connected directly to a home's wiring. The generator then feeds electricity back into the power lines. Backfeed can seriously injure, or even kill, the utility workers that are working to restore power or anyone else who comes in contact with the power line. It can also cause damage to the generator when electric service is restored.

Plug appliances directly into the generator. If you use an extension cord, make sure that it is the heavy-duty outdoor type and that is capable of handling the wattage of your appliances. Check the cord to make sure it is not worn or cut and that the plug has all three prongs, especially the grounding pin.


As stated before, NEVER plug a generator directly into a home outlet. If you must connect to the house wiring, a power transfer panel must be installed.

**Powering Up**
Handle the fuel for your generator carefully. Gasoline and its vapors may ignite if they come in contact with hot components or an electrical spark. Do not refuel a generator that is running or still hot.

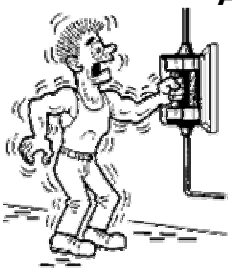
Never store fuel for your generator in the home. Gasoline should be stored outside of living areas in properly - labeled, non-glass safety containers. Do NOT store it near a fuel-burning

appliance, such as a natural gas water heater in a garage. If the fuel is spilled or the container is not sealed properly, invisible vapors from the fuel can travel along the ground and can be ignited by the appliance's pilot light or by arcs from electric switches in the appliance.

When filling gasoline cans, always make sure that they are on the ground and NOT inside a truck bed or vehicle.

Protect your appliances. Turn off or disconnect all appliances and lights before you begin operating the portable generator. Once the generator is running, start the largest appliance first and then plug in the other appliances one at a time to avoid overloading the unit.

**Avoid Electric Shock**



Keep the generator dry and do not use in rain or wet conditions. Make sure that your hands are dry and you're standing in a dry place whenever you operate the generator.

**Avoid Carbon Monoxide (CO) Poisoning**

According to the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC), most of the deaths associated with portable generators that were reported to their agency involved CO poisoning. CO is colorless, odorless gas, so it can be hard to detect and generators can produce high levels of CO very quickly.

The CPSC offers the following tips to avoid CO poisoning:

NEVER use a generator in enclosed or partially-enclosed spaces such as homes, or garages. Opening doors and windows or using fans will not prevent CO buildup in the home.

When you use a portable generator, remember that you cannot smell or see CO. So, even if you can't smell exhaust fumes, you may still be exposed to CO.

If you start to feel sick, dizzy, or weak while using a generator, get to fresh air RIGHT AWAY. DO NOT DELAY. The CO from generators can rapidly lead to full incapacitation and death

If you experience serious symptoms, get medical attention immediately. Inform medical staff that CO poisoning is suspected.

If you experienced symptoms while indoors, have someone call the fire department to determine when it is safe to re-enter the building.

Locate the unit outdoors and away from doors, windows, and vents that could allow CO to come indoors.


Install battery-operated CO alarms or plug-in CO alarms with battery back-up in your home, according to the manufacturer's installation instructions.

The CO alarms should be certified to the requirements of the latest safety standards for CO alarms (UL 2034, IAS 6-96, or CSA 6.19.01).

Test your CO alarms frequently and replace dead batteries.

Sources:
U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission
Florida Power
DTE Energy

# Fat Facts for Everyday Eating

**By Loveda C. Perry, Extension Agent**
**Expanded Food & Nutrition Education Program**

**Nutrition Facts**
Serving Size 1 cup (228g)
Servings Per Container 2

**Amount Per Serving**
**Calories** 260 — Calories from Fat 120

| | % Daily Value* |
|---|---|
| **Total Fat** 13g | **20%** |
| Saturated Fat 5g | **25%** |
| *Trans* Fat 2g | |
| **Cholesterol** 30mg | **10%** |
| **Sodium** 660mg | **28%** |
| **Total Carbohydrate** 31g | **10%** |
| Dietary Fiber 0g | **0%** |
| Sugars 5g | |
| **Protein** 5g | |

Vitamin A 4% • Vitamin C 2%
Calcium 15% • Iron 4%

* Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your Daily Values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs:

| | Calories: | 2,000 | 2,500 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Total Fat | Less than | 65g | 80g |
| Sat Fat | Less than | 20g | 25g |
| Cholesterol | Less than | 300mg | 300mg |
| Sodium | Less than | 2,400mg | 2,400mg |
| Total Carbohydrate | | 300g | 375g |
| Dietary Fiber | | 25g | 30g |

Calories per gram:
Fat 9 • Carbohydrate 4 • Protein 4

Fat is an important nutrient for health and well being. Fats provide our bodies with energy, essential nutrients, help to store fat soluble vitamins A, D, E and K and builds cell structure. Without fats we wouldn't be able to store the nutrients that help keep our eyes healthy and our bones strong. But like many things, a small amount can be a good thing but a lot is not necessarily better.

The information we receive on fats can be very confusing for the consumer-this is good, that is bad, eat more this, etc…..

The truth is:

**W**e all need fats in our daily intake.

**F**ats help our body with a variety of health benefits.

**A**ll fats should also be limited because of the higher amount of calories per gram vs. protein and carbohydrates.

**S**ome types of fat should be limited because of increased health concerns that accompany a high intake.

Fats are all over the store. They are in the cooking oil aisle where you can choose corn oil, safflower oil, etc. They are in the meat aisle in the different cuts of meat. They are in the dairy aisle where you see butter, margarine, sour cream, etc. These fats are obvious. Other fats are not so obvious to us however. These hidden fats are in bakery products, boxed products, canned soups, 'ready to' entrees, frozen desserts. The list can go on and on but it makes one hungry to think about all those yummy foods. So how am I supposed to figure all this out?

The first thing is to learn to read food labels. Reading food labels helps us become more aware of the amount of fat as well as the types of fat that are in the foods we are choosing. Remember, not all cereals are created equal.

Label information contains

Total calories from fat

Total fat in grams,

Saturated fat in grams

Remember all information on the label is based on 1 serving. Make sure you read how many servings per container and the serving size.

The fats in our diet should not exceed 30% of our total daily intake. That means if you are allowed 2000 calories each day (refer to MyPyramid.gov for individual calorie allowances), then you should only have approximately 600 calories from fat. When choosing fats it is best to understand what you are looking for that will be the best choice for health benefits.

**Saturated fats**: come from mostly animal sources-beef, pork, dairy made from whole milk and some plant sources-coconut, palm and palm kernel oil. These are the fats you want to limit. Choose dairy products that are fat free or low fat. It is recommended to choose more fruits, vegetables and grains and limit animal protein sources to 2-3 ounces per day. Substitute meat for beans at least 3 days a week and use more fish. Save steaks and ribs for special occasions like a family cookout.

**Polyunsaturated fats:** Found in plant sources. These include safflower, sesame, sunflower, corn, and soybean oils, as well as nuts and seeds.

**Monounsaturated fats:** Also found in plant sources including canola, olive and peanut oils and avocadoes.

The saturated fats are the ones to limit the most because of the health risk they are associated with-heart disease, strokes, etc. That is because these fats are known to clog arteries causing atherosclerosis (hardening of the arteries). This hardening and clogging restricts circulation causing heart attacks and strokes. Read food labels to limit these foods in your grocery cart-and ultimately on your dinner table.

The Polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fats (although you want to limit the amount due to calories) are the fats you want to choose. Read labels on margarine, salad dressings, condiments, processed foods, bakery items, snack foods, mixes etc-anything processed. Read the ingredient list for the types of fats used in processing and then read the label for total fat grams and calories per serving. When it is available choose products that have little or no Trans-fatty acids. This nutrient will be available on all labels beginning 2006. Trans-fatty acids pose similar health risks as saturated fats because of their processing.

Read more at:

http://www.americanheart.org

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