Effect of the “Almond Mom”

Is it possible to be too healthy? Some health experts are weighing in on this. The phrase “almond mom” has been circulating on social media in recent days. The phrase originated when a video went viral of someone on the popular television show “The Real Housewives of Beverly Hills.” In the video, a mom is caught telling her daughter to just “eat a couple almonds” after the daughter says she is hungry and feeling lightheaded. The video prompted hundreds of young adults to turn to social media and share their own accounts of similar experiences, and how the video clip reminded them of their own childhoods.

The moral of the story? The food restrictions some parents implement on themselves in front of their children can follow a child into adulthood. Abby Vladika, an OSF HealthCare family medicine advanced practice nurse, talks about the importance of eating a balanced diet and not being overly restrictive with the foods you eat.

“When patterns are developed at a young age – sometimes even as early as five, six, or seven years old – and we emphasize and focus on negative aspects of food, that can create a pattern that follows children. So when you are talking about foods with kids, you want to emphasize healthy choices,” says Vladika.

If you had an “almond mom” growing up, it can be hard to shake the habit of restricting certain foods from your diet, like carbohydrates and fats. Skipping the slice of cake at a birthday party or not eating a sandwich because you are avoiding bread are habits that may seem normal to you. But when kids begin to observe these habits they may start to pick up on them, and it becomes a domino effect cycle that can be hard to break.

While eating healthy is not a problem in and of itself, it can become a problem when food groups are completely avoided. Vladika says that there are not necessarily any “bad” food groups and that it is a better option to eat all food groups in moderation rather than avoiding a food group altogether. She adds that instilling this mindset in your kids is important as well.

“I’m a big advocate of healthy eating with balance, moderation, and really avoiding using the word ‘diet’ because diets tend to be trendy and not sustainable long-term. So overall, with kids, really set the foundation of healthy eating habits and how to incorporate those and discuss why certain foods are good foods versus mentioning ‘bad’ foods. Maybe instead explain why we eat more of something and less of another,” Vladika explains.

In addition to eating food groups in moderation, you should aim to opt for whole foods whenever possible. Some people pick groceries that appear to be the healthier option because they have labels like “sugar-free” or “fat-free” – but these may not necessarily be the healthiest options.

“When we look at foods that are considered fat-free or sugar-free, a lot of times they are processed and may be filled with additives and preservatives – things that are not great for our bodies and aren’t easy to digest,” says Vladika.

Furthermore, some people try to avoid eating fruit altogether because it contains sugar. This type of sugar, however, is not the same as the added sugar that is found in something like candy. Vladika says it is important to know the difference, and that not all sugars are unhealthy. The same can be said for foods containing fats. While fatty foods such as French fries and fast food do not need to be avoided altogether, the kind of fat in those foods should be consumed less frequently. Healthy fats such as avocados and olive oil, however, are good for the body and should not be avoided.

The bottom line is that there is no one food group that should be avoided altogether.

“Unless you have a chronic medical condition like Crohn’s or celiac disease or you are gluten intolerant where obviously you want to avoid those foods that might flare up those diseases, but restrictive eating should just really be considered just eating in moderation is what’s best,” Vladika advises.

Whether you are working to break old eating habits or are aiming to instill healthy eating habits in your own kids, remember that there is no such thing as a “bad” food. While some foods are healthier than others, eating and enjoying all foods in moderation is key.

Visit http://www.myplate.gov to learn more about whole foods and nutrition guidelines.