

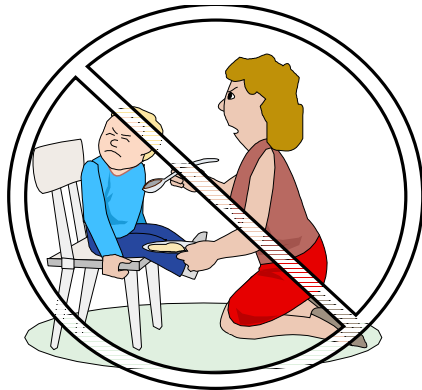


NutritionMatters

Nutrition Services | Health Services Department

Surviving Mealtime Mania

Feeding your toddler or preschooler can be a real challenge. There may be days when your child is not interested in food. Do not despair! There are ways to make mealtimes easier.



Set the example

Your child watches what you eat and how you eat. If mom enjoys peas and carrots, your child may decide that they are worth trying. Likewise, if dad avoids broccoli, your child may not want to try it either.

Children are also influenced by what other children eat. Your child may be willing to try a new food at childcare or at a friend's home where other children are eating.

Do not limit family food choices based on your child's present likes and dislikes. Food habits learned during childhood can set a lifelong pattern for eating.

"How can I introduce a new food to my child?"

It is perfectly normal for your child to refuse to eat new foods. Take the mystery out of a new food by talking about it and by letting your child help prepare it.

Encourage tasting, but don't force your child to eat the new food. A young child may need to be served a new food many times before he will try it. Give your child small amounts of a new food along with familiar foods. Offer a new food on a day when your child is happy and hungry.

"Help! My child won't eat. What can I do?"

Refusing to eat may be your child's way of taking control in his life. It may have little to do with the actual food.

In this situation, you may find yourself pressuring your child to eat. In fact, you can't force a child to do anything they don't want to. If you try, you will cause unhappy scenes and unpleasant feelings about eating. Forcing a child to eat usually leads to power struggles. Your child may realize that food can be used as a weapon for getting his way.

One approach is to have a quiet time before mealtime. Also, let your child know when it is almost mealtime, so he will be more likely to stop playing and come to eat. Offer healthy food in an attractive, simple way, leave it for a reasonable time, then remove uneaten food without comment. Do not be a short order cook. Instead, have simple, healthy foods handy as a stand by, such as bread, cheese, cereal and fruit. Avoid coaxing or bribing.

Toddlers and preschoolers listen to their hunger cues. They know how much food their bodies need. As a parent, you can relax once you have put the food on the table because it is then time for your child to decide how much and even whether they eat.

The Division of Responsibility

Parents are responsible for *what*, *when* and *where* the child is fed. The child is responsible for *how much* he eats and *whether he eats*.

“My toddler won’t stay at the table and if I try to make him stay, he throws food and makes such a mess.”

It is important to set limits and make sure your child knows your expectations. Be consistent. When you set a limit, stick to it. If your child knows that you will bend the rules when he acts in a certain way (for example, throws food or screams), he’ll expect you to always bend the rules. Ask him to leave the table. This shows him that his behaviour is not acceptable or polite. Keeping him at the table will not make him eat more.

“My child was such a good eater. Now he hardly eats a thing. What happened?”

During the first year, children grow very fast and need lots of food. Around the time of your child’s first birthday, you may notice that he is less hungry. Around this time, growth slows down and he becomes more interested in other things. You will notice that your child’s appetite will change day-to-day. Offer second helpings on days when your child seems hungrier. Simply take away the plate with uneaten foods on days when he is not very hungry. Your child knows when he is hungry and

when he has eaten enough. Young children need to control their own eating. Offer finger foods so that he can feed himself.

Finger Food Ideas

- Cheese sticks or chunks
- Penne pasta
- Bread, bagel or pita
- Fresh or canned fruit and vegetables

Many picky eaters drink too much juice and milk which means they are less hungry for food.

Limit milk to 2 cups and limit juice to ½ cup daily.

Fruit drinks, such as products labelled drink, ade, beverage, punch, blend or cocktail are not fruit juices and do not contain very much actual fruit juice. If your child is thirsty between meals and snacks, offer water.

“How much should my child eat?”

Toddlers’ and preschoolers’ bodies are small and need only small amounts of food. A young child’s portion is between ¼ to ½ of an adult portion. For example, a portion of green peas would be ¼ cup. Seeing a full plate of food can turn off a young child’s appetite. Offer small portions, followed by seconds, as your child wishes.

“My child will only eat peanut butter sandwiches and apples. Does he need a vitamin supplement?”

When a child will only eat or drink one or a few foods, it is called a “food jag”. The less you make of it, the faster it will end. Offer other foods as part of the meal or serve that food at only one meal each day. As a goal, try to offer three of the four food

groups at each meal and two of the four food groups at snack time. If a child is eating a variety of foods from the four food groups - Grain Products, Vegetables and Fruit, Milk Products and Meat and Alternatives - supplements are rarely needed. If supplements are needed, a dietitian or doctor can offer advice. Be sure to keep supplements out of reach of children to avoid poisoning.

“I’m afraid snacking will ruin my child’s appetite for meals.”

Snacking too often will effect your child’s appetite. Offer three meals and two or three snacks each day. Set snack times a couple of hours before the next meal, so



that your child is hungry at mealtime. Healthy snacks are an important part of what your child eats every day, as he may not be able

to eat large meals or may even refuse a meal occasionally. A child needs a regular routine of meals and snacks.

“Should I give my child dessert when he doesn’t finish his meal?”

Offer a healthy dessert even when your child does not eat his main course.

Healthy Dessert Ideas

- Fruit Crisp
- Yogurt
- Milk Pudding
- Custard
- Fresh Fruit

Food should not be used as either a reward or a bribe. Reward your child by reading a favourite story, playing a game together or going for a walk or special outing.

“How can I get my child to eat vegetables?”

Before age two, children are more open to trying vegetables, so offer a variety of vegetables to your one year old.

Vegetable Ideas

- Cook vegetables to tender crisp.
- Add shredded carrot or zucchini to ground beef and make into patties for burgers or add to chili, spaghetti sauce, meat loaf, shepherd’s pie and potato pancake batter.
- Involve your child by growing vegetables in the garden. Children love to plant their own seeds and watch them grow!
- Serve tortilla roll-ups spread with cream cheese and grated carrot.
- As a snack, put fresh peas, carrot curls or snow peas in a cup.
- Make a cucumber log by peeling cucumber, cut length-wise, scoop out seeds and fill with tuna or egg salad.

Fruit has many of the same nutrients as vegetables, so don’t be too concerned if your child won’t eat vegetables, as long as he is eating fruit.

CAUTION!

Be aware that hard pieces of raw vegetable or fruit and round foods can be a choking hazard for children until 4 years of age. Feed these foods safely by supervising children while they eat; make sure children are sitting upright, not walking, running or lying down while eating.

“How can I get my child to eat meat?”

Sometimes young children refuse to eat meat because they have trouble chewing the meat or they are not used to the texture. Offer small, very tender servings

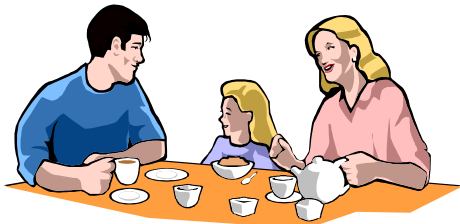
of meat cooked in a broth, either cut into very small pieces or ground. Meat cooked in a slow cooker or crockpot is very tender. Serve ground meat in sauce with pasta or as a meatloaf. Offer other foods that are meat alternatives, such as eggs, peanut butter, lentils, kidney beans or tofu.

“How can I get my child to drink milk?”

Toddlers and preschoolers need two cups of milk every day, which may seem like a lot, but remember this includes not only milk as a beverage, but as an ingredient. Try preparing recipes with milk, such as rice or milk pudding, cream soup, quiche, scrambled egg, omelette, pancakes, custard, fruit milkshake, hot chocolate or scalloped potatoes. Skim milk powder may be added to mashed potatoes or hot cereal. Your child may accept chocolate milk or milk in a colourful cup with a straw. Offer milk products, such as cheese and yogurt.

Remember to relax...

Mealtime should be a relaxed, happy time. Calm people and calm surroundings will help you and your child enjoy eating and each other's company. Avoid distractions such as TV, noisy conversations or phone calls during mealtime.



There may be times when mealtimes seem totally frustrating, however you are likely doing better than you think! Remember that children have tiny stomachs and do

not need a lot of food to be satisfied. Meals are a time when both you and your child can learn about food and each other. Relax and enjoy this short time in your young child's life!

Ideas to make mealtime fun

- Serve food with colourful placemats, cups and dishes.
- Cut sliced fruit or sandwiches into fun shapes with cookie cutters.
- Make melon balls.
- Have snack time in a pup tent or have an indoor picnic on a rainy day.
- Have breakfast foods for supper and supper-time foods for breakfast.
- Prepare a meal with mini-size foods, such as mini-pancakes, muffins, or meatloaves.
- Prepare a meal with foods of the same shapes, such as meatballs, pasta circles and green peas.



Recommended Reading

Better Food for Kids. By Joanne Saab and Daina Kalnins. Toronto: Robert Rose Inc., 2002.

Child of Mine: Feeding with Love and Good Sense. By Ellyn Satter. Palo Alto: Bull Publishing Company, 2000.

Raising Happy, Healthy, Weight-wise Kids. By Judy Toews, Nicole Parton and Graham Harrop. Toronto: Key Porter Books Limited, 2000.