

# HEALTHY BEGINNINGS

## CHANGING YUCK TO YUM (ONE TO FIVE YEARS)

Would you describe your child as a picky eater? Do you want your child to be a better eater? Are you feeling fed up with mealtimes and just not sure what to do?

You are not alone. Many parents have these common concerns.

Feeding behaviour that seems problematic may actually be normal and expected for your child's age. Feeding practices have also changed over time so how you were fed as a child may be different to what is recommended now.

### PARENTS PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE

How you approach feeding will have an impact on your child's eating behaviours and the mealtime experience for the entire family.

Trust your child to manage their appetite.

If you allow your child to decide how much to eat (follow their signs of hunger and fullness), it will help them to eat better and lower their chance of food and weight problems later on.

Your child's appetite is affected by:

- Activity level
- Mood or energy level (e.g. excited or tired)
- Growth needs (e.g. finishing a growth spurt)

Keep in mind that appetite changes from day to day or even meal to meal are expected. Food likes and dislikes can change quickly.



### PRACTICAL TIPS YOU CAN START TODAY

#### Establish a meal and snack routine

- Offer three meals and two to three snacks each day
- Offer a healthy meal or snack every two and a half to three hours
- Avoid letting your child eat or drink (e.g. milk, juice) between meals and snacks. Instead, offer water

#### Consider but do not cater

- The more you cater to your child's likes and dislikes, the pickier they will become
- Offer the same food as the rest of the family and modify the texture as needed

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1-877-464-9675  
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[york.ca/feedingkids](http://york.ca/feedingkids)

- Offer at least one healthy food your child likes
- Try family-style eating (place food on the table in platters and let your child self-serve)
- Do not go back to the kitchen to get different food if your child refuses to eat

Follow Canada's Food Guide. Offer a fruit or vegetable (or both) at meals and snacks

### Offer child-size portions

- Since small stomachs fill up quickly, offer portions that are about one quarter to one half of an adult portion size
- Your child will ask for more if they are hungry

### What they drink matters

- Too much milk or juice, including drinking between meals, can affect their appetite
- Milk – If they are not breastfeeding, offer 500 mL (two cups) of milk a day. Try 125 mL (half cup) servings at meals and at least one snack each day
- Water – Offer as much as your child would like. Water will not lower their appetite
- Juice (including homemade juice)
  - Less than one year old - it is best not to offer juice at all
  - 1 to 3 years old – avoid or limit to ½ cup (125 mL) per day
  - 4 to 6 years old – avoid or limit to ½ to ¾ cup (125 to 175 mL) per day
- All other drinks – Avoid
- Place drinks in an open cup; not a bottle

### Let your child feed themselves

- Cut up foods so your child can use their fingers, a spoon or fork easily
- Avoid placing food into their mouth for them
- Expect a mess; it will get better in time

You do not need to buy special products or foods (e.g. rice rusks or food puffs)

### Let them say “no thank you” or “more please”

- If you allow your child to say “no” to food, they will be more likely to say “yes”
- Allow them to be in control of their appetite
- If your child says that they do not like the food, say “Oh, okay,” or ignore it
- Let them politely spit out food they do not like

### Remove distractions

- Even though it can feel like your child will sit longer, distractions do not help over time
- Avoid use of the TV, tablet, computer, cell phone, toys or any other electronic device
- Avoid texting, talking on the phone or using electric devices yourself at the table
- Instead, talk and pay attention to your child without making them the centre of attention

### Eat together as a family

- Role model healthy eating
- Enjoy the time spent together
- Let your child leave the table when they are full (15 to 20 minutes is usually enough time)
- Limit meal and snack time to 30 minutes

### Keep mealtime relaxing and free of pressure

- Avoid forcing or bribing and remember it can take many times for your child to learn about and enjoy a new food
- Rules like “take one bite” or “at least taste it” are forms of pressure
- Saying “good girl, you ate it” or “you will grow strong if you eat it” are also forms of pressure

- Using food as reward or withholding dessert until your child eats all their meal are not strategies that work in the long run. Instead, if you have dessert, offer it regardless of how much your child eats
- Do not make comments about how little or how much your child eats. Instead, have pleasant conversation about other topics

## IF YOUR CHILD DOES NOT LIKE TO EAT VEGETABLES

It may take time for your child to enjoy eating vegetables. Perhaps they struggle to like some vegetables due to the strong bitter flavour.

When thinking about how many vegetables your child eats, reflect on what they have eaten over a few days. They may be eating more than you think. Especially when you consider that vegetables and fruit are one food group and have similar nutrients.

### Tips for parents

- Do not pressure, bribe or beg your child to eat vegetables
- Offer small servings of vegetables at each meal (one to two tablespoons), but do not insist that your child eat or try them
- Let your child help prepare vegetables. Even if it is to help get it out of the fridge or wash it
- Set an example by eating vegetables yourself
- Take your child to the grocery store or farmers market and let them choose
- Visit a pick-your own vegetable farm
- Enjoy reading storybooks about vegetables

### Vegetables ideas

- Cut yellow, orange, red or green peppers into small bite-sized pieces (half to one centimetre or one quarter inch) or into thin strips

- Cut-up pieces of broccoli (cooked or raw) and serve with a dip or dressing
- Grate raw vegetables like carrots or zucchini
- Cook baby carrots until just soft. Cool them in the fridge. Slice cooled carrots thinly and serve with hummus
- Try using frozen vegetables (avoid ones with added sauces or salt)
- Plant grape tomatoes in a pot and watch them grow. Then pick, wash and enjoy (for children under 4 years of age, cut into smaller pieces)
- Try less bitter tasting vegetables like peas, carrots and potatoes
- Cook vegetables in low-sodium chicken, beef or vegetable broth instead of water for added flavour
- Add a sprinkle of nutmeg and cinnamon to cooked squash or sweet potatoes
- Add flavour to any cooked vegetable by adding grated cheese, herbs, spices or low sodium soy sauce

### Adding vegetables to recipes

While adding cut-up, grated or mashed vegetables to recipes will add nutrition, it is still important to serve vegetables on their own. Your child needs to be exposed to the unique taste and texture of different vegetables.

Be cautious of online recipes and cookbooks that promote hiding or sneaking in vegetables.

This approach is not a substitute for offering vegetables separately and can cause a child to reject the food that is hiding the vegetable or become suspicious of every food you offer.

If vegetables are always mixed in, your child will not have the opportunity to learn how to enjoy vegetables. This includes pre-packaged or pouches of pureed vegetables with added fruit.

## IF YOUR CHILD DOES NOT LIKE TO EAT MEAT

It may also take time to enjoy eating meat. While the texture of meat can make it challenging to chew, there are things you can do to help support your child as they learn to enjoy eating meat.

### Tips for parents

- Do not pressure, bribe or beg your child to eat meat
- Offer small meat servings but do not insist that your child eat or try them
- Let them help you prepare the meat. Let them get it out of the fridge or pour a marinade
- Set an example by eating meat yourself
- Include alternatives to meat in your meals

### Tips to make meat easier to chew

- Simmer meats in low-sodium broths for added flavour and tenderness
- Chop or grind meat into soups or casseroles
- Use ground beef, turkey or chicken to make mini burgers, meatballs or meat loaf
- Serve meat with small amounts of hummus, tzatziki, ranch dressing, salsa, tahini, ketchup, applesauce or peanut sauce

Remember that eggs and plant-based proteins like nut butter, tofu, beans, lentils, and soy-based meat substitutes have similar nutrients to meat and will help your child get the nutrition they need.

For vegans and vegetarians who do not eat meat, consider careful meal planning or talk to a registered dietitian.

### Food ideas that are alternatives to meat

- **French toast** - Soak sliced bread in mixture of egg with a bit of milk and cinnamon. Cook on stovetop until golden brown. Cut into

pieces or strips. Serve with applesauce or yogurt

- **Hard-boiled eggs** – Cover eggs with water in pot. Bring to a boil. Put the lid on. Turn burner off. Wait 15 minutes. Rinse well
- **Egg, tuna or salmon salad** - Mix chopped hard-boiled egg, canned tuna or canned salmon and a small amount of mayonnaise. Spread on bread, crackers or pita
- **Fish fingers** - Dip pieces of white fish (pollock, tilapia) in milk. Roll in breadcrumbs or panko. Herbs and spices optional. Bake in oven on a baking sheet at 450°F (230°C) for 10 to 12 minutes. Serve with favourite dip or sauce
- **Tofu smoothie** - In a blender, blend soft tofu, milk or fortified soy beverage and fruit
- **Tomato lentil sauce** - Mash red lentils (cooked or canned). Add to tomato sauce and serve on noodles, cooked vegetables or as a dip with whole grain crackers
- **Edamame** - Sprinkle parmesan cheese on boiled edamame. Your child may enjoy squeezing the beans out of the bean pod
- **Almond pancakes** – Mix in 2 tablespoons of ground almonds into the batter for every pancake. Serve with yogurt or applesauce
- **Banana bites** - Spread peanut or almond butter on a tortilla. Roll up a banana into the tortilla. Cut the roll into round slices

## WHERE TO FIND MORE INFORMATION

For more information and additional nutrition resources, visit:

- York Region Public Health - [york.ca/feedingkids](http://york.ca/feedingkids)
- Dietitians of Canada - [unlockfood.ca](http://unlockfood.ca)
- Ellyn Satter Institute - [ellynsatterinstitute.org](http://ellynsatterinstitute.org)

To speak to a registered dietitian at no cost, call Telehealth Ontario at 1-866-797-0000.

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