

## Feeding Tips for Mealtime and Snacktime with Toddlers

Young children seem like they are always moving – they don't stop for anything, even food. Nibbling and snacking throughout the day may fit more with their active lifestyles than big meals. But if they nibble all day long, how do you know if they are getting enough to eat? A good way to know how much to give your child at mealtime is to remember that a young child's stomach is approximately the size of his or her fist. So, give small portions at first and refill when your child asks for more. Your child may eat well one day and eat almost nothing the next day. Children from one to three years old need between 1,000 and 1,300 calories a day, but they may not eat that much every day. Try to think about a nutritionally-balanced WEEK, not a day.

If you're concerned that picky eating is affecting your child's growth and development, talk to your child's doctor. But, before you do, make a list of the types and amounts of food your child eats for three days. That list can also help your child's doctor determine any problems. And, in the meantime, remember that your child's eating habits won't likely change overnight — but the small steps you take each day can help promote a lifetime of healthy eating.

### Here are some tips that may help reduce the stress around mealtime and snack time:

#### Respect your child's appetite or lack of one

- 🍎 If your child isn't hungry, don't force a meal or snack.
- 🍎 Don't bribe or force your child to eat certain foods or clean his or her plate.

#### Set a meal time and snack time routine

- 🍎 Serve meals and snacks at about the same times every day.
- 🍎 Serve meals and snacks at the table when the child is seated.
- 🍎 Decide how long a meal or snack will last. One suggestion is that meals might last about 30 minutes and snacks last about 15-20 minutes, depending on the age of your child.
- 🍎 Give your child juice or milk with the food.
  - 🥕 Only give him or her offer water between meals and snacks.
  - 🥕 Allowing your child to fill up on juice or milk between meals might decrease his or her appetite for meals.
















#### Make mealtimes positive

- 🍎 Ignore minor age consistent behaviors such as occasionally throwing food on the floor, spilling, messiness or banging utensils.
- 🍎 Bribing, coaxing or yelling during meals only makes your child eat less and can even lead to more difficulty with eating.






#### Be patient with new foods



- 🍎 Offer new foods often and repeatedly (a child may need 10-20 exposures before they will eat a new food).
- 🍎 Young children want to touch and smell new foods. They may even put tiny bits in their mouths and then take them back out again.
- 🍎 Talk to your child about a food's color, shape, smell and texture — not whether it tastes good.
- 🍎 Serve new foods along with your child's favorite foods.

### **Make food fun**


-  Serve broccoli and other veggies with a favorite dip or sauce. Dipping is fun (and messy).
-  Offer dips such as cottage cheese, cream cheese, guacamole, peanut butter, yogurt, and pureed fruits or vegetables.
-  Cut foods into various shapes.
  -  Apple moons
  -  Banana wheels
  -  Carrot swords
  -  Cheese blocks
  -  Broccoli trees
-  Use cookie cutters to cut sandwiches, pancakes, waffles and pizza into shapes.
-  Offer breakfast foods for dinner. Let her eat dinner foods in the morning if that's what she wants and will eat.
-  Serve a variety of brightly colored foods.
-  Offer toppings.
  -  Put favorite (nutritious) toppings on foods that might be new or less liked by your child.
  -  Toppings could include yogurt, melted cheese, peanut butter, applesauce, tomato sauce, guacamole, or cream cheese.
-  If your child would rather drink than eat, make smoothies! Milk and fruit can be mixed with juice, egg powder, yogurt, honey, or peanut butter for a healthy meal or snack.

### **Recruit your child's help**






-  At the grocery store, ask your child to help you select fruits, vegetables and other healthy foods. (Don't buy anything that you don't want your child to eat.)
-  At home, encourage your child to help you prepare meals.
  -  Rinse vegetables and fruits.
  -  Stir batter.
  -  Set the table.

-  Plant a garden with your child. Let him help water and pick the vegetables.
-  Encourage your child to feed herself when she child is ready and able (even though an adult feeding the child may be less messy or require less time).
















### **Set a good example**

-  If you eat a variety of healthy foods, your child is more likely to want to eat the same foods.

### **Be creative (or even sneaky!)**

-  Put pancake batter in a squeeze bottle and squeeze it into fun shapes on the griddle. Try spelling your child's name.
-  Add chopped broccoli or green peppers to spaghetti sauce.
-  Top cereal with fruit slices.
-  Mix grated zucchini and carrots into casseroles, soups, breads, muffins.
-  Add grated or diced vegetables to rice, cottage cheese, or macaroni and cheese.

### **Focus on Nutrient-rich foods**

-  There are some foods that are richer in nutrients than others. If your child will eat any of these, try to include them in meals and snacks.
  -  Avocados
  -  Pasta
  -  Broccoli
  -  Peanut butter
  -  Brown rice
  -  Potatoes
  -  Cheese
  -  Eggs
  -  Sweet potatoes
  -  Yogurt
  -  Poultry
  -  Fish
  -  Kidney beans
  -  Tofu



### **Minimize distractions**

- 🍏 Turn off the television and other electronic gadgets and toys during meals.

### **Don't offer dessert as a reward**

- 🍏 Withholding dessert sends the message that dessert is the best food, which might only increase your child's desire for sweets.
- 🍏 Select one or two nights a week as dessert nights, and skip dessert the rest of the week.
- 🍏 Redefine dessert as fruit, yogurt or other healthy choices.

### **Don't be a short-order cook**

- 🍏 Buy healthy foods. Prepare nutritious foods. Serve it creatively. If your child eats and how much he eat is up to him.
- 🍏 Don't feel like you have to make a separate meal for your child if he or she rejects the original meal.
- 🍏 Encourage your child to stay at the table for the designated mealtime, even if she doesn't eat.
- 🍏 Keep serving your child various healthy choices until they become familiar and preferred.

*Compiled and Adapted from:  
Mayoclinic.com  
AskDrSears.com  
Earlyinterventionsupport.com*