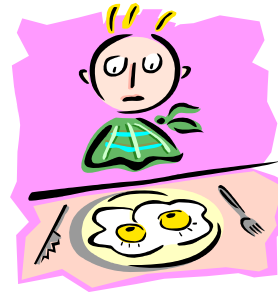


Feeding Children Isn't Always Easy



What You Can Do

While parents are the best judges of **what** children should eat and **when**, children are quite often the best judges of **how much** they should eat.. Here are **five** important feeding jobs for parents and caregivers:

1. Offer a variety of healthful and tasty foods. Be adventurous!
2. Serve meals and snacks on a regular schedule.
3. Make mealtime an enjoyable experience.
4. Teach good manners at the table.
5. Set a good example by sitting down at the table and eating with your children.

Right from the start enjoyable encounters with food help to set the scene for sensible eating habits throughout life. Handling food and eating situations positively encourages healthy food choices and eating habits further down the track. Caregivers often view a child's odd food and eating behaviours as a problem but childhood food and feeding challenges are usually part of normal development.. Children quickly work out that mealtime is just the ideal "stage" for a performance and they have your undivided attention.

Mealtime Is More Than Food

Try not to worry if a child skips a meal or won't eat the vegetables on his or her plate. Relax and focus on the positive. Find something to praise at the meal even if it was just the fact that they sat at the table. Nutrition is very important, but sometimes it is more important to keep the big picture in mind.

Children are too smart to fall for "Do as I say, not as I do." Children learn by copying what they see. Adults who eat poorly can't expect their children to eat well. Set a good example by eating meals at regular times and by making healthy and tasty food choices. Enjoy your food too.

Mealtime - Not a Battleground

Even if getting enough food and fluids at every meal is a really big issue for your child, and we know some of you worry a great deal about this, it is still OK to miss one meal just occasionally. Sometimes this is preferable to having food battles which occur at every meal. Take the uneaten food away and offer only a piece of fruit until the next mealtime. Start the next meal 'with a clean slate' and quite often the child's appetite is greatly improved. They will also have learned a valuable lesson about who is the boss at mealtimes.

At one time or another most children will try at least some of these little tricks – just to keep you on your toes....Try these tips to make mealtime a more pleasant experience.

Feeding Challenges...

The One Food Diet

Eats one and only one food, at every meal. Won't eat anything else.

The Short Order Cook Diet

This is where the child refuses to eat what is cooked, so something else is cooked to tempt them and when that is refused, the cook keeps cooking until the child finally eats something.

“The TV Habit”

Always wants to watch TV at mealtimes

The White Food Diet

Eats only bread, potatoes, macaroni and milk.

The Complainer

Whines or complains about the food being served. “I don't like

New Food Phobia

Refuses to try new foods

Feeding Strategies...

Give the child what he or she wants if the “one ” food is reasonably healthy. Always offer other foods first at each meal. After a few days, the child will probably try other foods. “One Food Diets” rarely last long enough to cause any real harm.

Have bread, rolls or fruit available at each meal, so there are usually choices that the child likes. Be supportive, set limits and don't be afraid to let the child go hungry if he or she won't eat what is served. Which is worse, an occasional missed meal or a parent who is a perpetual short-order cook? Remember the third item you cook has even less chance of being eaten than the first. Sometimes a child will refuse food if they are really tired. If the first choice is refused, and you are really concerned that they will starve, try something quick and easy like “Cup a Soup” and dairy food or icecream to follow.

Turn off the television. Mealtime TV is a distraction that prevents family interaction and interferes with a child's eating. Value the time spent together while eating. Often it is the only time during the day that families can be together. An occasional meal with TV that the whole family can enjoy is fine.

Avoid pressuring the child to eat other foods. Giving more attention to finicky eating habits only reinforces a child's demands to limit foods. Continue to offer a variety of food-group foods. Encourage a taste of red, orange, or green foods. Eventually the child will move on to other foods. If milk intake is higher than 1000ml per day, this may be the cause and should be gradually reduced.

First ask the child to eat other foods offered at the meal. If the child cannot behave well, ask the child to sit quietly away from the table until the meal is finished. Don't let him or her take food along, return for dessert or eat until the next planned meal or snack time.

Serve a new food with one your child likes. Continue to offer and reinforce new foods over time. It may take many tries before a child is ready to taste a new food... and a lot of tastes, perhaps as many as 6 to 10 times before a child likes it. Don't force, but don't stop offering

Occasional meal skipping and finicky food habits are okay but if you think it is affecting your child's growth, help is available from your local community dietitian.

By Barbara Cormack, Paediatric Dietitian, 2008