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Feeding Your Child From Two to Six

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Good eating habits can help promote good health and happiness for your child. Lifetime eating habits usually are formed in early childhood. Parents can help develop good habits by making mealtime pleasant and relaxed. It can be a time to enjoy a variety of things and to learn about food.

It's no wonder a child becomes fussy and refuses food if—

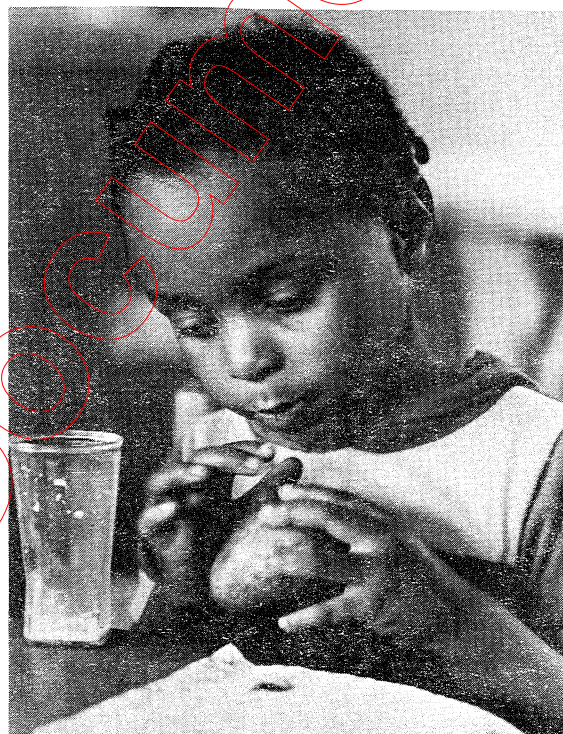
- he or she is overly tired from lack of sleep or too long a playtime.
- the meal is a hurried affair and thrown together at the last minute.
- members of the family fuss with each other at meals or grab a bite and rush to the TV or other places.

If these are eating patterns of the family, your child may be on the way to becoming a problem eater for life.

DEVELOP GOOD EATING HABITS

Here are some "common-sense" suggestions to help your child learn good eating habits:

1. Serve small portions on a small plate.
2. Serve new foods at the beginning of a meal while your child is hungry. Serve familiar foods with new foods.
3. Serve dessert as part of the meal with no bribes, threats, or promises attached.
4. Serve food in different ways for interest: cut meat into strips; cut vegetables and fruits in rings; serve in a pretty dish; make a raisin face on oatmeal.
5. Be casual, friendly, and patient. Nagging, forcing, or bribing is no solution. A hungry child will eat.
6. Respect likes and dislikes. You like some foods better than others; so will your child. Don't



force food even though it's "good for us". The disliked food may be accepted later if the issue is not forced.

7. Set a good example:
 - Say nice things about food.
 - Avoid excess sugar, salt, fats.
 - Enter into friendly conversations.
 - Practice good manners. Children are great imitators.
8. Let children help. Eating is more fun to the child who helped fix it. Children can:
 - scrub potatoes or carrots.
 - set the table—so what if the silver is misplaced?
 - make toast.
 - pour milk on cereal.
 - other small tasks.

9. Expect imperfect manners and accidents. Very young children like to feed themselves. It may be messy but they have to learn. They'll use fingers first. Patiently show how to hold and use a spoon and fork. Be prepared for accidents and accept them without fussing.
10. Allow time to eat. Have meals at a regular time so your child will learn to stop playing and be ready to eat. If a child wants to continue playing, don't force eating, but if it's mealtime, insist on a quiet time even without eating.

If there is dawdling and the food isn't eaten at the end of 20 or 30 minutes, take it away with a firm "no more for now." This sets an example that meals have a time limit. A few useful rules give a child a feeling of security. Make only those rules that you will enforce.
11. Let small children leave the table when they have finished eating. Small children cannot sit still for long. A simple "may I be excused" is soon learned. Eventually if mealtime is fun for everyone, your child will want to stay longer.

PREVENT EATING PROBLEMS

Don't Use Food as a Reward

Eat your vegetables or you won't get dessert," gives the impression that dessert is better than vegetables. "Be a good girl and you can have ice cream," is another way to say some food is special. Avoid using food as a reward or punishment.

Serve dessert casually as part of the meal. This will cause it to not seem more desirable than other foods but only a part of the day's planned food supply.

Provide Learning Experiences

Serve many different kinds of fruits, vegetables, milk and cheese, meats, cereals, breads, and desserts, all served in different ways. Your child will learn at home to like many foods. A greater variety of foods is more likely to result in good nutrition.

Never Force Food

A child eats more one day than another. Children grow in spurts—sometimes fast, sometimes slow—and their appetites go up and down with their growth rate. Sometimes they hardly touch food—at other times they eat everything in sight. This is normal. Continue to offer good food in child-size portions. If more is wanted, second helpings can be served.

A child that is forced to clean his plate may create a lifetime dislike for certain foods or develop habits of over eating.

Set Good Examples

Show by words and examples that food is good. Children learn to "like" or "dislike" food as others around them, especially their parents, show their likes and dislikes. Avoid adding sugar, salt, and excess fats to food at the table. A child is likely to add too much and develop a taste for the excess amounts. Food habits learned as children usually are carried into adulthood and are very hard to unlearn.

Children get hungry near mealtime. The smell or sight of food stimulates the appetite. A small portion of milk, raw vegetable, or other non-sweet can prevent excessive hunger without spoiling the appetite.

Avoid sweets or large quantities of food within an hour of mealtime.

FOODS FOR THE PRE-SCHOOL CHILD

Children need the same kinds of foods that adults need—only the amounts differ:

MILK AND MILK FOODS—2 to 3 cups a day. No other food does as much for a growing child. It furnishes:

- protein to build muscle and body tissue.
- calcium and phosphorus to build bones and teeth.
- fat and sugar for energy.
- riboflavin to help other nutrients work well.

A serving is $\frac{1}{2}$ to 1 cup of milk. If a child can not drink the amount needed, there are other ways to include milk in the diet:

1. Cook cereals in milk instead of water.
2. Make soup with milk.
3. Use milk desserts such as tapioca, rice or bread puddings, or custards.
4. Ice cream. For very young children, use plain ice cream without nuts or rich flavorings.
5. Cheese. A 1-inch cube is equal in calcium content to $\frac{1}{2}$ cup milk. Use it for snacks, too.
6. Yogurt, plain or fruit flavored.

MEAT GROUP—2 servings each day. Includes beef, pork, fish, poultry, eggs, dry beans and peas, and peanut butter. The meat group gives:

- protein to build muscles and body tissues.
- iron and phosphorus to build blood.
- B-complex vitamins necessary for growth and good health.

A serving for children:

- 1 egg
- 2 to 4 tablespoons of meat, boneless fish, or poultry (ground for the very young; small bite-size pieces for those who chew well)
- 2 tablespoons of peanut butter
- 2 to 4 tablespoons of dried beans or peas

FRUITS AND VEGETABLES—4 servings a day.

This group will furnish:

- minerals to build bones, blood, and tissue
- vitamins to promote growth and health
- roughage (fiber) to help with elimination

Include daily:

1. One good Vitamin C source, such as grapefruit, orange, tomatoes, cabbage, broccoli, or greens. These can be fresh, frozen, raw, canned or as juice.
2. Three servings of other vegetables or fruits. A dark green or yellow vegetable or fruit at least every other day for Vitamin A.

Serving Sizes:

- Juice - $\frac{1}{3}$ to $\frac{2}{3}$ cup
- Vegetables - 2 to 4 tablespoons
- Fruit - $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ cup
- Raw fruit - $\frac{1}{2}$ to 1 whole apple, orange, bananas, carrot, tomato

BREAD AND CEREALS— 4 servings daily. It furnishes:

- starches to supply energy
- protein to build muscle and tissue
- minerals to build bones and blood
- B-vitamins for good health and growth

Servings Sizes:

- $\frac{1}{2}$ to 1 slice of bread
- $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ cup cereal
- $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ cup rice, noodles, macaroni, or grits

Serving Tips:

1. Serve cereals with plenty of milk.
2. Serve cooked cereals warm, not hot.
3. Serve cereals with little or no sugar. Add raisins, chopped dates, bananas, berries, or other fruits for interest and flavor.
4. Cut bread or toast in slices or quarters so it's easy to handle.
5. Macaroni, rice, noodles, grits are cereal foods.

OTHER FOODS—Butter or margarine, sweets, gelatin, dressings, seasonings, and additional food as needed for variety and for healthy growth.

How About Vitamin and Other Supplements?

Some parents think all children need extra nutrients in the form of vitamin pills or drops. Most

people who eat a varied diet from the four groups described above get enough nutrients. Let your doctor decide if vitamins or other supplements are necessary. To give them when they are not needed is a waste of money and may be harmful.

What Children Like

Young children have a very keen sense of smell and taste, so foods don't have to be salty or highly seasoned to be appealing. In preparing meals and snacks remember that children like:

Bright Colors: Red gelatin, orange carrots, green beans, peas.

Mild Flavors: Young carrots, new potatoes, bananas, and applesauce are all appealing to a young child. If you cook cauliflower, cabbage, or broccoli, cook it a very short time to prevent developing strong flavors.

Different Textures: Crisp raw fruits and vegetables, smooth soups and puddings, and soft-cooked meat or eggs.

Finger Foods: Carrots sticks, sandwiches, and small pieces of lettuce or bread.

Different Temperatures: Children like food a little cooler than adults like it but warm enough to be appetizing. Cold foods such as gelatin, custards, and ice cream are favorites with children.

Unmixed, Simple Foods: Most children usually prefer meat and vegetables they can see and identify rather than in a casserole; plain lettuce, sliced tomatoes, or carrots sticks instead of tossed salad.

Snacks Are Food

A child usually needs to eat more than three times a day, so snacks help to furnish the necessary food. Without snacks a child may get overly tired and fussy, but keep snacks the smaller part of the day's food supply. Good eating habits include eating *regular meals* with *snacks* as smaller portions between meals. In time three good meals will be all your child needs.

It's best to have snacks about the same time each day, not closer than an hour before or after mealtime. Good snacks are a wonderful chance to give a child new and different food and food from all four groups during the day. The best snacks provide protein, minerals or vitamins but are low in sugar, fat and salt. Sugar contributes to tooth decay. Sugar and fats, if eaten in excess, contribute to over weight. Too much salt is often a factor in high blood pressure. Most people, including children, enjoy sweet or fatty snacks sometimes, but such foods should be kept to

occasional use and not become daily practice. Remember that you are establishing eating habits for a lifetime.

How do the snacks rate that your children eat? Check the lists below:

SOME SNACKS THAT ARE HIGH IN PROTEIN, VITAMINS AND MINERALS

Raw vegetables such as carrots or celery sticks, cauliflower flowerets, cabbage or lettuce wedges.

Fresh or canned fruit or juice.

Cheese cut in wedges or cubes for easy handling

Hard cooked or deviled egg

Toast or bread with milk

Custards

Milk or milk drinks

Crackers or bread with peanut butter, cheese or meat

Cookies containing oatmeal, peanut butter, vegetables, or fruits with milk

Ice cream (occasionally)

SOME SNACKS THAT ARE HIGH IN SUGAR, FAT, OR SALT

Candy

Pop

*Cakes and pies

Doughnuts

Bread and Jelly

Snack crackers, puffs, cheese flavored curls

Most cookies

Fruit-flavored drinks

Potato chips, corn chips

*Some cakes without icing and pies are nutritious but because of their high sugar and fat content are not recommended for frequent snacks.

If You Think There Are Eating Problems

If you have reason to think your child is overweight or eats too much or seems to be thin or does not eat enough, it's a good idea to have him or her checked by a doctor. If he or she is growing well, eating well, and there are no weight problems, stop worrying. Children go on eating jags when they eat mostly one or a few foods for a few days.

If obesity is a problem, check to see if your child is eating too many fatty, starchy or sweet foods, or too much food. Are snacks nutritious or do they contribute an excess of calories? Does your child get enough exercise? Is too much time spent at quiet activities that use few calories? Most children who are overweight have one or more overweight parents because they all eat the same food and the children follow their parents eating habits. See that the family's meals and snacks contain more fruits and vegetables, and less fat, starchy food, and sweets. Use the information from this guide or get a Food For Fitness Guide from your Extension Home Economist to help plan food needs for the family.

Continue offering good nutritious food in a pleasing way for the underweight child who doesn't eat much. It may be a normal "slowdown" stage of growth.

The best way for your child to develop good eating habits is to have mealtime a happy, fun time for the whole family. This also makes good memories!

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