



## Changing yuck to yum! Ten tips to help your child become a good eater...



Is your child a picky eater? Does your child's appetite change from one day to the next? Do you get frustrated at mealtime because they will not eat what you serve? Try not to worry. What seems like a

problem may actually be normal behaviour for your child's age. Here are ten tips to make meal and snack times easier.

### 1. Provide the food and let your child do the rest!

Put yourself in charge of the family menu. Prepare one meal for the whole family. Once you get to the table, let your child choose what and how much they want to eat from what you have prepared. Let your child eat as much or as little as they want.

#### It's up to you to decide:

- What foods to offer
- When to offer meals and snacks
- Where your child will eat

#### Trust your child to decide:

- Which foods to eat
- How much to eat

Your child's body will tell them how much to eat. The amount of food your child eats can vary from day to day and meal to meal,

depending on their appetite, activity level and whether they are experiencing a growth spurt. Their appetite may also change when they are excited or tired. This means some days your child might not eat very much at all, but on other days, they will eat more than usual. Letting your child decide how much to eat will encourage them to be a better eater and lower their chance of food and weight related problems as they get older.

#### Good to know...

The more that parents cater to their child's likes and dislikes, the pickier their child will become.

### 2. Provide a healthy meal or snack every two or three hours

Young children need three small meals and two to three snacks each day. Avoid letting your child eat or drink whenever they want between meals or snacks (other than water). Meals should include foods from three or four food groups in Canada's Food Guide. Include at least two food groups for snacks. Always have a nutritious food on the table that you know your child likes. This way your child can find something nutritious that they will eat. Snack time is an important time for your child to get good nutrition – make sure you offer healthy choices at most snacks.

### 3. Turn the television off

Television, phone calls and toys distract your child and other family members from

eating and interfere with family social time. Talk and pay attention to your child, but don't let them be the centre of attention.

#### **4. Offer child-size portions**

Because children have small stomachs that fill up quickly, they need to eat small amounts of food during the day. One Food Guide Serving from a food group can be divided up into smaller amounts and served throughout the day. Offer portions that are about  $\frac{1}{4}$  to  $\frac{1}{2}$  of an adult portion size, and let your child ask for more if they are hungry. For example, offer two cut up strawberries instead of four, and if your child wants more, they will ask.

#### **5. Limit juice and milk**

Children may not be hungry at meal and snack times if they are filling up on juice or milk during or between meals. To meet the needed two cups of milk per day, offer half cup servings at meals and most snacks. Limit juice to half a cup daily and avoid serving fruit-flavoured drinks or pop. If your child is thirsty between meals and snacks, water is the best choice.

Children who use bottles should be switched to a cup by 12 to 15 months old.

#### **6. Allow your child to say “no thank you” or “more please”**

If your child says that they don't like the food on the table, say “Oh, okay,” or ignore it. If you allow your child to say “no” to food, it helps them to feel comfortable to say “yes” more often. Allow your child to politely spit out food they don't like.

#### **7. Children can feed themselves**

Offer foods in a way that your child can eat on their own. Cut up foods so your child can use their fingers or a spoon or fork easily. Expect a mess, especially with younger children. Let them eat in their own way.

#### **8. Let your child leave the table when they are full**

Children know how much to eat. When young children are hungry, they will eat. When they are full, they will stop eating. Don't worry how much your child eats. Over time, if healthy foods are offered most often, your child will get the calories and nutrients they need. 20-30 minutes is enough time to eat.

#### **9. Keep mealtime free of pressure**

Forcing or bribing your child to eat turns eating into a battle that nobody wins. If they don't want to eat a food, be neutral about it and leave it to try again without pressure another day. Children may need to try a new food up to 15 times before they will accept it. It may feel like your child is refusing many foods, but slowly, over time your child will start to try and eat new foods.

A healthy relationship with food in the long term is more important than eating “broccoli” today.

#### **10. Eat together as a family whenever possible**

Make mealtime a relaxing family time with pleasant conversation. Children learn by watching their parents and caregivers eat and behave at the table, so be a good role model. If you avoid tomatoes, your child may not want to eat them either. If family members enjoy peas and carrots, your child may decide that they are worth trying.

