

# Raising a Healthy Happy Eater Video

## Commonly Asked Questions by Parents

Developed by Public Health Nutritionists  
Nutrition and Food Services

**This resource is a supplement to the Raising a Healthy Happy Eater video and should not be used as a stand-alone resource. If you have further questions or concerns about your child's eating, please contact your healthcare provider for more information.**



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# Learning to Eat

## When can children start to feed themselves and how?

- When children start showing signs of readiness for solid foods around 6 months, they can also start learning to feed themselves with support (example: using an open cup or spoon with a little help). Over time, they will become more independent and drink from a cup alone or feed themselves with a spoon.
- Children often use their hands to eat, often up to ten years of age. When children develop a pincher grasp, around nine months, they can start to eat finger foods such as shredded cheese or pieces of soft-cooked vegetables.
- Eating is a learning process for children, so eating together is important at all ages.

## Are there any non-pressure tips to encourage my toddler to be interested in new foods?

- Understand it is normal to take 12 or more exposures to a new food before your child accepts it.
- Continue to serve new foods, in different ways. Make it fun by cutting foods into different shapes. Remain neutral if your child explores or eats the food, or does not.
- Shop, gather and prepare food together, when possible.
- Talk about foods in a neutral manner such as where they come from or describe the color/shape/texture.
- Eat together so your child can see others eating foods that are new to them.

## My 12 month old refuses to eat any textures and will only accept pureed foods, should I be concerned?

- When your child is ready to begin solids (around 6 months of age), you can offer a variety of textures such as minced, ground, lumpy, pureed, mashed, shredded, or safe finger foods.
  - ⇒ Safe finger foods include foods such as soft cooked vegetables and fruits, cut up-soft fruits such as banana or melon, minced, ground or shredded cooked meat, pieces of cooked fish or poultry without bones, cubed tofu, scrambled eggs, grated cheese, and pieces of toasted bread.
- If you are starting with pureed foods, they are meant to be for a limited time. Progress to other textures as soon as your child is able to tolerate them. It is important to introduce lumpy textures before 9 months to avoid feeding problems later on.
- When starting solids, you can spoon feed and allow them to pick up finger foods and self-feed where possible. They will gradually progress to only self-feeding with lots of practice. Encourage your child to self-feed, even if it is messy.
- Whenever possible, use family foods and modify what is already prepared for the family meal.

***If your child is not accepting lumpy textures by 9 months, talk to your healthcare provider.***

## Does my child need a multivitamin?

- It is best to get nutrients from food. Once your child is on solid foods, ensure you offer a variety of foods from Canada's Food Guide. If they are eating a variety of foods, growing well, and are healthy, a multivitamin is usually not needed. Exceptions exist. If you have questions or concerns, talk with your health care provider.
- It is important to note that all babies receiving breast milk need a daily supplement of 10µg (400 IU) of Vitamin D.

## How many snacks should I offer?

- By 12 months, children should generally be offered 3 meals and 2 to 3 snacks per day. Aim for meals and snacks to be about 2 to 3 hours apart.

## How much milk or juice is okay?

- Once cow's milk is introduced and part of the regular diet, provide it in an open cup and offer no more than 16 to 24 ounces or 2 to 3 cups per day to prevent your child from filling up on milk. By filling up on milk, children miss out on important nutrients from other foods, including iron. Low intake of iron can increase the risk of anemia.
- Juice is not a recommended beverage for children because it is high in sugar and low in nutrients. It is best to limit or avoid. It can cause early tooth decay, even before teeth come in.
- If offering, choose 100% juice, and limit how often and the amount that is offered (less than a ½ cup a day). Only offer it in an open cup at meals or snacks.

## How much should my child eat?

- Needs vary between children and even between days. Offer your child small amounts of each food and then let them ask for more.
- Allow your child to listen to their body to know if they are hungry or full. Follow their cues.

## I worry about my child's weight, do I still follow the Division of Responsibility?

- Yes, do your job with feeding and let your child do their job with eating.
- Know that restriction or pressure will have the opposite effect. A child who is pressured to eat more is more likely to eat less and a child who is restricted is more likely to eat more.
- Healthy bodies come in all different shapes and sizes. Children who get the message they weigh more than they should tend to have poorer self-esteem, higher risk for depression, anxiety, and more negative self-talk.

***If your child has had unexplained changes in their growth, talk to your healthcare provider.***

# Mealtime Strategies

## **My toddler throws her food and plate on the floor, what should I do?**

- Stay calm and neutral. Say something such as ‘food stays on the table’.
- Young children may not need a plate. Instead, try putting food directly onto the table or high chair tray.
- This behavior may be a sign that your child is not hungry or that they are full and done eating. It can also be a reaction if they feel pressured to eat.
- Ensure you are helping your child come to the table hungry by following scheduled meals and snacks.

## **My child is often upset when he has to come to the table. How do I get him to enjoy coming to the table, be interested in eating, and stay until he is full?**

- To prepare your child that mealtime is arriving, try to provide a 10 to 15 minute warning. This warning allows them to finish playing and prepare for the meal or snack.
- Have a family routine to signal mealtime is coming such as tidying toys, reading a book, turning off background noise, washing hands or singing a song.
- Offer meals and snacks every 2 to 3 hours and offer only water between meals/snacks. Having scheduled meals and snacks instead of grazing throughout the day will help your child have an appetite and be interested in food when it comes time to eat.
- Create an enjoyable mealtime environment: eat together when you can, ensure your child has supportive seating, and keep the conversation positive. Avoid pressuring your child to eat a certain amount, certain foods, or foods in a certain order.
- Remove distractions by turning off the TV, phones, and tablets, and putting toys away so the focus can be on eating.
- Have reasonable expectations for your child to remain seated at the table. For example, it may not be realistic for your toddler to sit as long as your teenager.
- Allow your child to do their job with eating and trust that they will eat the amount they need.

# Refusing to Eat

## What do I do when my child eats very little or sometimes only one food at a meal, or refuses to eat any of the meal at all?

- Continue to do your job with feeding and let your child do their job with eating.
- Offer foods in a neutral way, and include at least one food they typically eat.
- Avoid pressuring them (including praise) to eat, but have them stay at the table for an appropriate amount of time (based on their age and individual abilities).
- Be patient. Once they understand eating is in their control they will be more likely to choose from what is offered.

*This can be a normal behaviour and will happen from time to time. If it happens for an extended period of time, or if you are concerned about your child's health, discuss with your healthcare provider.*

## My child refuses to eat any fruits or vegetables, how can I get her to eat them without pressure?

- Continue to offer vegetables and fruits in a variety of shapes or textures as a part of meals and snacks, and along with other familiar foods.
- Be patient, offer them neutrally and without pressure. Avoid labelling fruits and vegetables as healthy, praising your child for eating them or commenting on how much they should eat.
- Involve your child in learning about foods outside of mealtimes by learning about their cultural significance, family traditions, gardening, where they come from, grocery shopping, and cooking.
- Eat together as a family. Model eating a variety of vegetables and fruits. With time, as they observe others eating vegetables and fruits, they will be more likely to try them.

## What if my child only wants to eat their favorite foods and nothing else?

- Continue to offer a variety of foods without expectation or pressure to eat. Ensure to include at least one food they typically accept at each meal and snack.
- In order to give them the opportunity to choose different foods, avoid offering your child's same favorite food too often.
- Remain neutral, keep the mealtime positive, and eventually your child will pick more foods from what you have offered.
- Be patient, be consistent, and give it time. Your child needs to learn and trust that their job of eating is within their control and is without pressure.

## Refusing to Eat Continued...

### **My child refuses to eat at a meal but then asks for a snack shortly after, do I give them a snack?**

- No. When the meal is complete, kindly let your child know there will be no food until the next meal or snack and when that will be.
- Offer meals and snacks at regular times (2 to 3 hours apart), with water to drink in between. At the next meal or snack, offer (without pressure) a variety of nourishing options and include at least one food they typically eat.
- Focus on your job with feeding and let the child do their job with eating. Be patient, it may take some time. Usually once a child learns they are in control of their eating, they will be able to enjoy meals with the family.

### **If my child does not like what I have offered, do I make them something else?**

- No. Avoid catering to each child or making separate meals. Making separate meals goes against the division of responsibility and can encourage mealtime struggles and picky-eating to continue. It can also lead your child to eat less variety and make them less likely to try new foods.
- Offer a variety of foods, being sure to include one food they usually enjoy at meals and snacks. Ensure you are doing your role with feeding and letting the child do their role with eating.
- If they are still not interested in eating, consider they may not be hungry and offer a different meal or snack at the next scheduled time to eat.
- If possible, involve children in grocery shopping, picking foods, and preparing foods to help them become interested in foods.



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**PIER—Patient Information and Education Resource**

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