

EATING PROBLEMS IN THE PRESCHOOLER

Approximately 1/3 of parents of preschoolers think their children eat inadequately.

Important Facts about Eating:

- ✓ Unless emotionally deprived, children WILL eat what they need for normal growth if offered an adequate diet.
- ✓ Eating works best when parents rely on the child for cues regarding pacing and amounts eaten.
- ✓ Children often react negatively to new foods but will accept them with time and re-exposure.
- ✓ All caregivers should use similar approaches to feeding to avoid contradictions and manipulation.
- ✓ Most conflicts in feeding/eating become issues of power and control, not nutrition.
- ✓ Forcing, even subtle, tends to backfire and lead to more resistance.
- ✓ There is a marked variation in the AMOUNT of food eating from day to day.
- ✓ At every age there is a WIDE variation in total daily calorie needs between different, normal children.
- ✓ CHOOSE YOUR BATTLES. You can stop a toddler from doing something but can't force him to do what you want.

Division of Responsibility in Eating:

- ✓ PARENTS are responsible for the food that is presented and in the manner in which it is presented. CHILDREN are responsible for HOW MUCH and even WHETHER OR NOT they eat.

Bottle-feeding:

Excessive and prolonged bottle-feeding contributes to:

- ✓ Poor sleep patterns.
- ✓ Constipation.
- ✓ Resistance to solids and “picky” eating.
- ✓ Iron deficiency anemia.
- ✓ Tooth decay.

THEREFORE:

- ✓ WEAN FROM THE BOTTLE BY 18 MONTHS.
- ✓ IF you give juice do so by cup only – NOT by bottle.
- ✓ After one year of age, limit milk to 16 oz daily.

Suggestions for Easier Eating:

- ✓ Make mealtimes pleasant family sharing times. **Avoid television at mealtimes.**
- ✓ Avoid conversation about eating – don't discuss how much anyone eats. Don't praise your child for eating a lot.
- ✓ Put your child in charge of how much she eats.
- ✓ Trust your child's appetite. The most common reason children are not hungry at mealtimes is that they have eaten too many snacks. Eliminate snacking, or limit to one nutritious snack between meals.
- ✓ Limit juice to less than 6 oz. per day.
- ✓ Remember that skipping a meal is harmless – however BREAKFAST is important.
- ✓ Offer finger foods at an early age (8-10 months) to encourage early self-feeding.
- ✓ Encourage early self-feeding – do not feed your child once she is capable of feeding herself.
- ✓ Once your child is old enough to use a spoon by herself (usually 18 months, nearly always two years) **DO NOT FEED her.** If she is hungry, she will feed herself.
- ✓ Serve small portions of food, and allow your child to indicate portion size at a young age.
- ✓ Set reasonable time limits for meals – maximum 30 minutes. DO NOT force your child to sit at the table until she finishes a specific amount of food. Don't make her sit at the table after the rest of the family has left. This will only develop unpleasant associations with mealtimes.
- ✓ **Don't 'short-order cook'**. Insist that everyone select from food prepared for that meal.
- ✓ Serve non-preferred foods regularly. Expect gradual changes in food preference.
- ✓ DO NOT bribe, force, beg, cajole, or threaten your child to get her to eat.
DO NOT turn eating into a game involving rewards.
DO NOT give frequent between meal snacks.
DO NOT feed your child after 18 to 24 months, encourage self feeding.
DO NOT pursue your child around the house or yard to get him to eat – insist on eating at the table with the family.

Suggested Reading:

- 1) *How To Get Your Kid To Eat, But Not Too Much* by Ellyn Satter
- 2) *French Kids Eat Everything* by Karen le Billon