



Restrictive Eating

What children eat and drink during their early years can affect their health for many years to come. General eating habits are formed in the first few years of life, so it is important that we encourage our children to eat nutritious food. If children's nutrition is a sore topic in your household, you're not alone. Many parents worry about what their children eat — and don't eat. Children's nutrition doesn't have to be frustrating. Consider these strategies to avoid power struggles and help the fussy eater in your family eat a balanced diet.



Tip 1. Serve the right amount. Offer your child 1 tablespoon of each food for each year of age. For example, if your child is 3, serve 3 tablespoons of each food. Small portions give your child the chance to ask for more.

Tip 2. Be patient. Offer new foods many times. You may have to offer a food 10 to 15 times before your child will try it.

Tip 3. Let your child help. Let your child choose foods in the grocery store. Then find a way your child can help prepare the meal or set the table. Participating in the different parts of mealtime may make your child more likely to eat.

Tip 4. Make things fun. Cut food into shapes with cookie cutters. Display the food in a creative way on your child's plate. Have your child come up with special names for their favorite foods.

Tip 5. Offer choices. Instead of serving a vegetable to your child, let them choose between two options. "Would you like broccoli or cauliflower for dinner?"

Tip 6. Mix new with old. Serve new foods alongside favorites. This may make trying something new easier.

Tip 7. Let them dip. Provide healthy dips to encourage your child to try new fruits or vegetables. These could include hummus, yogurt, or low-fat salad dressings.

Tip 8. Be a good example. If your child sees you eating a variety of healthy foods, they will be more likely to try them.

Tip 9. Don't force your child to clean their plate. Once your child is no longer hungry, they should be allowed to stop eating. Making them eat when they're not hungry can interfere with their natural cues that tell them when they've full. Allowing them to choose when to stop eating teaches them how to listen to their bodies and make healthy food choices.

Tip 10. Don't negotiate with or bribe your child. Threats, punishments, and rewards aren't good ideas, either. They can lead to power struggles. Avoid making deals. For example, don't tell them if they eat 3 more bites, they can have dessert. This teaches them to make deals to get rewards for other things. In addition, making dessert a reward gives it higher value in the child's mind. This can lead to unhealthy attitudes toward sweets.

Tip 11. It is important to remember most children do grow out of fussy eating and begin to accept a wider range of food in time. Very occasionally there might be an underlying problem that is contributing to a sudden loss of appetite and if you are concerned about your child please seek further advice from a health professional.

References

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