



Healthy from the Start!!

How feeding nurtures your young child's body, heart and mind

Feeding is one of a parent's most important jobs. It is how we help our children grow healthy and strong. But mealtimes are about much more than food. Meal and snack times give you a chance to help your baby or toddler:

- Learn healthy eating habits
- Feel important and loved
- Feel understood and respected
- Trust that others will care for her
- Feel good about her body

Here are some ways to help your child become a healthy eater:

• Remember: Meals are about more than food.

They are a time to connect with your child and to support her overall development. Talk with your child during meals and don't let her eat alone. Allocate enough time for the meal so that both you and your child can eat without stress. This helps build strong family relationships.

• Create routines around mealtime.

Routines make children feel loved and secure. Establish regular meal and snack times beginning when your child is 9-12 months old. Make sure your child sits well. To have a good chair is important. Walking around feeding the child sets up bad habits. Young children tend to love routines, having their own place to sit is good and this will make your child look forward to each meal.

• Offer 3 to 4 healthy food choices (that your child likes) at each meal.

Research shows that children will choose a healthy diet when they are offered a selection of different healthy foods.

• Don't force your baby or toddler to eat.

Talk about nice things, not about problems, especially the children's problems.

Talking about awkward things doesn't help the appetite. Forcing to eat often results in children refusing the food and eating less.

• Don't give up on new foods!

Patience is the key. You may have to repeatedly encourage your child to try new foods before she will eat it. If your child is not given the opportunity to try different tastes during his first two years of living, the risk is higher that she will be not try different foods later on. Children generally learn to like food that they eat often.

The first reaction a child of any age usually has is "I don't like this". Babies frown and spit. And then sometimes they gape for more. Older children might even refuse to taste anything new, thinking that it will taste awful.

Try to make new foods interesting and be content even if your child only tastes a tiny little piece on their finger the first time.

• Take away Toys - Turn off the TV (computers, etc) at mealtime.

The television will distract children from eating. Meals are for eating and communicating; it's not play time. It also takes time away from talking as a family.

• Healthy eating and exercise go hand in hand.

So make active play a part of everyday family life.

• If you are concerned about your child's weight or activity level, talk to your child's health care provider.

To learn more about feeding and young children, visit http://www.zerotothree.org/child-development/health-nutrition/health_eng.pdf

