

TIPS FOR FEEDING YOUR 1-6 YEAR OLD

Toddlers and preschoolers often experience struggles at mealtime. In their efforts to become more independent and to learn the rules, toddlers may challenge their caregivers in many ways. Mealtime is no exception! The following guidelines are designed to help you and your child develop good eating habits:

- Don't allow yourself to battle with your child over food – you will always end up frustrated.
- Expect “food jags” – that is, your child wants the same food over and over again or suddenly dislikes something she previously favored. These episodes pass with time.
- Don't allow large quantities of calorie-containing fluids. Limit your child's daily intake of juice to 4 ounces for children ages 1 to 3 years and to 6 ounces for ages 4 to 6 years and of milk to 24 ounces. Your child should drink as much water as she wants to quench her thirst. Water will not blunt her appetite. Use whole cow's milk until age two (unless 2% milk is recommended by your provider), then low fat or fat free milk thereafter.
- Allow food only at predictable eating times – breakfast, lunch, dinner, and one or two snacks. The child who snacks repeatedly will not be hungry at mealtime. If your child does not eat at a meal, she must wait until the next regular eating time. It will not harm her to go without food for this period of time.
- You decide what your child eats. She decides how much. Do not make several different meals at one sitting trying to please your child's whim.
- Do not pressure or try to force your child to eat. Make mealtime pleasant. Remove distractions such as TV and toys. Whenever possible, eat as a family. All family members should remain at their seats until everyone is finished.
- Don't give up! Continue to offer good choices even if you don't think your child will eat them. Use small portions and set a good example by making good choices yourself! Children may require repeated exposures (10-15 times) to a new food before accepting it.
- Do not have a “clean your plate” rule. Instead, let your child eat until she is no longer hungry, then stop. This will avoid overeating and weight problems.
- Do not use food as a bribe or a reward. Instead, use privileges or praise.

Certain foods are more likely to cause allergic reactions. Most food allergies involve cow's milk, soy, wheat, egg, seafood, peanut and tree nuts. Traditional recommendations included delaying the introduction of some of these foods. Currently there is no convincing evidence that delaying introduction of these foods reduces the risk of food allergy.

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