

Nutrition Facts

Managing Mealtimes

Feeding children can be hard at times. It's not uncommon for kids' food likes and dislikes to change often. This can make menu planning and mealtimes challenging. Don't be discouraged or take it personally if your child refuses to eat or try new foods. It's best to remain calm and not make a big deal of it. Being patient, creative, and continuing to offer new foods without a fuss, can help your child enjoy mealtimes and develop lifelong healthy eating habits.



Parents Decide:

WHAT to eat: Use Canada's Food Guide to plan meals and snacks. Prepare one meal for the whole family and include some healthy foods that your child enjoys. Offer only water between meals and snacks.

WHEN to eat: Serve meals and snacks at about the same time every day. Offer 3 meals and 2-3 snacks daily, about 2-3 hours apart.

WHERE to eat: Eat together as a family more often. Sit at a table away from screens (TV, computer, phone) when possible.



Children Decide:

WHICH foods to eat: Let your child choose which foods they want to eat from the variety of foods you offer for the meal or snack.

HOW MUCH food to eat: Trust that your child is able to decide how much food they need to eat.

Children may not eat well for many reasons:

- They are trying to get your attention by not eating... and this usually works.
- They do not like the look, smell, texture or colour of the food being served.
- They see their parents disliking foods or their parents not happy to try new foods.
- They are simply not hungry.
- They don't need to eat as much to help them grow that day or week.
- They would rather play or watch TV than come to the table to eat.

Helpful Tips

1. **Don't label your child as a "picky/fussy eater"**. This gives children an "excuse" not to try new foods. Labelling your child could also make them feel bad about themselves or create a negative relationship with food and eating.
2. **Be a good role model.** Children tend to eat what their parents eat, so practice healthy eating habits around your kids and happily try new foods!
3. **Avoid distractions at meals.** Turn off the TV, phones and computers and put away all toys so you and your child can focus on eating and conversation. Make family mealtimes enjoyable and take away any pressure to eat.
4. **Involve your child.** Children will be more likely to try new foods if you let them help with the meal planning, grocery shopping and preparing the meal. Expect a mess but do not make a fuss about it – children are learning!
5. **Listen to your child.** Respect your child's ability to decide when they are hungry or full. Allow them to leave the table when they are full. Avoid pressuring, forcing or bribing your child to eat more food. This can create unhealthy eating habits. Trust your children and their tummies because they will know how much is right for them.
6. **Keep trying.** Continue to offer new foods to your child. It can take as many as 10-15 tries before a child will accept a new food. Try new foods in different recipes and at different meals. Be creative and don't give up!

