

Growing Healthy Eaters

Learning to eat is a process. It can take time for children to get used to some tastes and textures. Try these tips below to help take some of the stress out of meal times.



Your child is learning

- There is lots to learn when it comes to eating. There are many flavours and textures to get used to. This is why children may refuse to eat certain foods.
- We are born with a preference for sweet foods. It takes time to get used to bland or bitter-tasting foods such as vegetables and meat.
- Children learn about foods through exposure. Focus on variety and don't stress if they reject a food. This is part of the learning process.



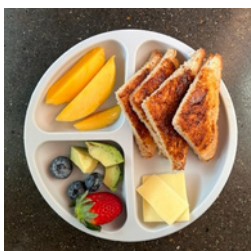
Quality over quantity

- Many things can affect a child's appetite including growth, sleep and illness. Try not to focus on how much your child eats as this will change from day-to-day.
- Focus on providing a variety from the five food groups in each meal and allow your child to choose what they want from their plate.



Let your child listen to their body's cues

- We are born with the natural ability to regulate our appetite. Trust your child if they say they aren't hungry or when they say they are full. If they refuse a meal, place it in the fridge for later. Avoid making a special meal as this can set up a habit that is hard to break.



Serve 'safe' foods with new ones

- Serve 'safe' or familiar foods with each meal. The safe food should be something that you are confident your child will eat.
- Including safe foods can help make meal times run more smoothly as your child can see something that they've eaten before.
- If your child refuses a meal that includes safe foods, it is possible they aren't hungry. Simply put the meal aside for later when they are hungry.
- If your child only eats the safe foods, that's ok! They are more likely to eat the new foods next time as they become more familiar with them.



Make meal times enjoyable

- Come to the table calm - children can sense when we are stressed.
- Try to avoid pressuring your child to eat. This can have the opposite affect, especially for picky eaters.



Repeated exposure is key

- It can take 10-15 times of a child seeing a food on their plate for them to accept the food. For some children it can take even longer.
- Don't give up if your child rejects a food. Keep offering.
- Serve new foods alongside familiar/safe foods.



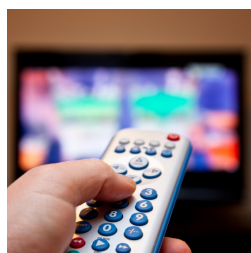
Know what you can and can't control

- When it comes to feeding children, there are some things you can control and some things you can't.
- As a parent/carer, you can control what you provide, when your child eats and where your child eats. You can't control if your child will eat it or how much they eat - this is your child's job.



Be a good role model

- The most effective way to influence your child's food choices is to show your child that you enjoy eating those foods. This shows them that the food is safe and will be more willing to try that food too.



Avoid distractions

- Distractions make it hard for young children to concentrate on eating. This can include screens, noisy siblings or the dog running around. Using a screen during meals can also make it hard for children to be aware they are full.



Create a mealtime routine

- Children who graze during the day may not want to eat at meal times.
- Avoid snacking and aim to have a meal time routine to make sure your child is hungry at meal times.
- A meal time routine for a young child might include breakfast, morning tea, lunch, afternoon tea, dinner and a snack between dinner and bed.

