

Growing Healthy Eaters



Learning to eat is a journey. Many children need lots of time and support to eat a wide variety of healthy foods. Below are some important things to know about children's eating and some tips to help your child become a healthy eater.

1 Your child is learning

Children need to learn how to eat. It takes time to get used to certain flavours and textures, particularly vegetables and meat. While children are learning, they may often reject foods, and that's ok. Children have to see some foods lots of times to become brave enough to try them.

2 Focus on quality, not quantity

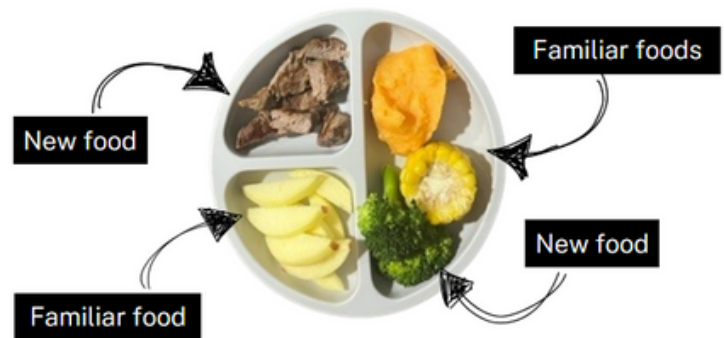
Sometimes children will eat more than we think they need and sometimes they will eat less. Growth, sleep, physical activity, illness, and teething can all affect appetite. Trust your child to eat to their appetite and don't stress about what is left on the plate. Instead focus on providing a variety of foods throughout the day. This helps your child to build a healthy relationship with food and eating.

3 Picky or cautious?

Many children develop a caution with new food in their first 5 years. This might mean that your child starts rejecting foods that they once enjoyed as a baby. This caution or 'picky' behaviour can extend late into primary school. Most children will grow out of this with a little help.

4 Familiar foods vs. new foods

Familiar foods are foods that your child would usually eat. New foods are ones they haven't tried before or haven't yet accepted. Every time you serve a meal, make sure you include foods that your child is familiar with, alongside some new ones. It's ok if your child only eats the familiar ones. They may need to see the new foods lots of times before they are brave enough to try them.



5 Repeated exposure is key

Children have to see some foods many times to build up the confidence to try them. If your child chooses not to eat a new food, don't give up, keep offering it. Try serving foods in different ways. For example, your child may prefer raw vegetables over cooked ones.

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6 Understand your role

Your role is to provide the food for your child and to decide where and when it is eaten. These are the things that you can control. Avoid allowing your child to take over this role, like asking for something else instead of what you have prepared. Including familiar foods with every meal should reduce the likelihood of this happening.

7 Let your child play their role

Your child's role is to decide what and how much they eat from what you have provided. Allowing your child to do this helps them to be more adventurous with food and develop healthy eating habits in the long term. Avoid taking over this role by encouraging them to eat more or certain types of foods. This can have the opposite effect and lead to a negative relationship with food.

8 Make mealtimes enjoyable

Calm and enjoyable mealtimes help children to feel relaxed. This can increase their willingness to eat new or more challenging foods. Having the family sit and enjoy the meal together is a way to build confidence at mealtimes. Avoid getting frustrated if your child chooses not to eat. How you respond in these situations can have a big impact on your child's feeding long term.

9 Set an example

Children are naturally cautious with food. Let your child see you eating the same foods as them. This shows them that the food is safe and can help them be more willing to try the food. Role modelling eating healthy foods is one of the best things you can do to help your child build confidence with a variety of healthy foods.

10 Encourage a mealtime routine

Children need to feel hungry when they come to mealtimes, particularly if the meal includes some new foods. Aim to have at least 2-hours between meals and discourage snacking throughout the day. If your child comes to a meal hungry, they are more likely to eat what you've provided.

