

Happy Mealtimes

It is important for children to develop healthy eating habits early in life. Here are some tips to help your child eat well.

What you can expect:

- Growth slows down after your child's first birthday and your child may eat less. Offer small amounts of healthy food at regular meal and snack times.
- It is normal for your child to eat more at one meal, and less at another meal.
- Many children enjoy feeding themselves. Offer finger foods. Let your child use child-size forks, spoons and cups.
- If your child refuses to eat, this may be his way of showing control over his life. Continue to offer your child healthy foods and contact a health care provider if you have concerns.
- Children are easily distracted. Put toys away and turn the TV off at meal and snack times. A young child may be happy to sit at the table for up to 15-20 minutes.
- Children prefer foods they know and like. They may choose not to eat a new food the first time it is offered. Offer a new food with well-liked foods.

Your child learns about food and healthy eating from you! Set a good example.

- Sit down as a family for meals.
- Keep meal times happy and calm.
- Be a role model. Teach table manners.
- Talk about the food you are eating.
- Ask your child to help you prepare food or help set the table.
- Respect your child's likes and dislikes.
- Never use food as a punishment or reward.



Hamilton

Public Health Services

www.hamilton.ca/nutrition

Health Connections @ 905-546-3550

Parent or caregiver is responsible for **what to offer and where and when** to eat.

Child is responsible for **how much and whether** to eat.

Young children know when they are hungry and when they are full. Let them decide how much to eat.

How can I encourage my child to eat well?

- **Have regular meal and snack times.** Avoid feeding your child in between these times so that he is hungry at meal and snack times. Children like routine.
- **Offer water to drink if your child is thirsty.** Limit juice and milk between meals and snacks.
- **Respect tiny tummies.** Start by offering small amounts of food at regular meal and snack times. Offer second helpings if your child wants more. Offer foods from Canada's Food Guide.
- **Make every bite count.** Offer healthy foods every day. Limit foods and beverages high in sugar, fat or salt such as candy, soft drinks, chocolate, chips and cake. Save them for special occasions.
- **Offer one meal only.** Offer your family 1 meal choice which includes at least 1 food that your child enjoys.
- **Let your child decide.** Once you have provided healthy foods, let your child decide what and how much to eat.

A relaxed approach to food and mealtimes is a great way to encourage healthy eating behaviours in your child.

How can I encourage my child to eat a greater variety of food?

- **Offer food in new ways.** Try cutting food into fun shapes, or offer finger foods with a dip or sauce.
- **Offer a "nibble tray."** At snack time, fill a muffin tin or ice cube tray with bite-sized portions of colourful, healthy food in each section. Try cheese cubes, grape halves, broccoli florets, and cereal squares.
- **Let children help.** Children can help wash and tear lettuce, scrub potatoes, stir batter, or set the table.
- **Ignore "food jags."** A food jag is when a child will only eat one or a few foods. It is quite common and usually does not last long. Offer other foods along with the favorite food.

How much milk does my child need?

- **Two cups a day.** Toddlers and preschoolers need 2 cups (500 mL) of milk every day to help meet daily calcium and vitamin D needs. A fortified soy beverage is an option for children over 2 years.
- **Spread milk throughout the day.** For example, ½ cup at breakfast; ½ cup at lunch, ½ cup at dinner; ½ cup at snack.
- **Don't like milk?** If your child does not like to drink milk, add it to soups, puddings, scrambled eggs, pancakes, or a smoothie (fruit, milk, yogurt blended together).
- **Offer milk products** such as cheese and yogurt to help meet calcium needs.

How can I encourage my child to eat more vegetables?

- **Try vegetables raw or cooked.** Serve raw veggies with a healthy dip made from yogurt. Grated raw carrots or thin sticks are a better choice for children under age 4. Sprinkle cheese on cooked broccoli or cauliflower. Choose brightly coloured vegetables and fruit.
- **Add them to favourite foods.** Add grated or diced vegetables to spaghetti sauce, soups, pizza, macaroni and cheese, pancake or muffin batter.
- **Offer fruit instead.** Serve fruit to your child if she refuses to eat vegetables. Fruits and vegetables have similar nutrients. Include orange fruit such as cantaloupe, mango, apricots, papaya and peaches.
- **Limit juice.** Offer no more than $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ cups (125 to 175 mL) a day. Fruit juices are missing some of the nutrients and fibre of whole fruit and vegetables. Avoid fruit “punch,” “drink,” “beverage,” and “cocktail”. These fruit drinks have sugar added to them. Choose 100% fruit juice.
- **Plant a garden.** Let your child help water plants, pick, wash and prepare vegetables. He may be more interested in eating vegetables when he gets to help.
- **Make veggie art.** Create fun “faces” with olive eyes, tomato ears, and green pepper mouths.

Do not pressure or force your child to eat. This usually leads to power struggles and unhappy mealtimes.

How do I encourage my child to eat meat?

- **Soft and tender.** Offer soft, tender meats that are easy to chew. Serve small pieces of meat in a soup or sauce.
- **Try ground meat.** Serve ground beef/turkey/chicken in a pasta sauce, casserole, meatloaf, or meatballs.
- **Offer meat alternatives** such as fish, eggs, peanut butter, beans, tofu, and lentils.

How can I help my child try new foods?

- **Serve new foods often.** Continue to offer new foods on the table with the rest of the meal. If your child chooses not to eat the new food, try again another day. Stay calm. Do not pressure your child to try new foods.
- **Talk about a new food** and let your child help prepare it. Look through a cookbook together or have him pick out a new vegetable at the grocery store.
- **Give your child small amounts** of a new food along with a favourite food, on a day when he is happy and hungry.
- **Allow your child to explore new foods.** When trying a new food he may touch it, taste it, lick it, put it in his mouth, spit it out or eat it!
- **Eat the food yourself.** If your child sees you eating a new food, he is more likely to try it too.

It can take many tastes of a new food before your child learns to like it. Be patient and calm, and try again.

For more information

Books

- Secrets of Feeding a Healthy Family: Orchestrating and Enjoying the Family Meal. Ellyn Satter. Palo Alto CA: Bull Publishing, 2008.
- Food to Grow On: Give Your Kids a Healthy Start in Life. Susan Mendelson & Rena Mendelson. Toronto, ON: Harper Perrenial, 2005.
- Your Child's Weight: Helping Without Harming, Birth Through Adolescence. Ellyn Satter. Palo Alto, CA: Bull Publishing, 2005.
- Child of Mine: Feeding With Love and Good Sense. Ellyn Satter. Palo Alto CA: Bull Publishing Co., 2000.

Cookbooks

- Cook! Dietitians of Canada. Mary Sue Waisman. Robert Rose Publishing, 2011.
- Simply Great Food. Dietitians of Canada. Patricia Chuey, Eileen Campbell & Mary Sue Waisman. Robert Rose Publishing, 2007.
- Meals Without Squeals: Child Care Feeding Guide and Cookbook. Christine Berman & Jacki Fromer. Emeryville, CA: Publishers Group West Bull Publishing, 2006.

Websites

City of Hamilton - Public Health Services, Nutrition
www.hamilton.ca/nutrition

Dietitians of Canada, Your Health
www.dietitians.ca/Your-Health.aspx

Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide
www.healthcanada.gc.ca/foodguide

EatRight Ontario
www.eatrightontario.ca

Meal Planning Made Easy
www.mealplanningmadeeasy.ca

Public Health Agency of Canada, Child Health
www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/ch-se-eng.php

Foodland Ontario
www.foodland.gov.on.ca

NutriSTEP - Nutrition Screening Tool for Every Preshooler
www.nutristep.ca

