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How Can I Avoid Arguing With my Child Over Food at Every Meal?

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For many families eating a family meal comes with its challenges. It is not uncommon for parents and children to be in disagreement about what's on the menu, who's eating (or not eating) what, and how much should be eaten. Night after night, it can be exhausting for some families. Mealtime should be enjoyable. To avoid conflict at supper, serve the meal without commenting about who needs to eat what and how much. Be sure to provide your child with reasonable, healthy food choices, but don't force him to eat. As a parent or caregiver, you decide the menu and mealtime, and your child decides what to eat

and how much. As difficult as it may be, it's important to give your child some control. You may be surprised to learn how well children can self-regulate when it comes to food. "It's your child's decision whether or not to eat, what to eat from what is being offered, and how much of it," says Nancy Hudson, a registered dietitian at the University of California at Davis.



What Do I Do if My Child Refuses to Eat What I Serve?

Did your parents force you to eat everything on your plate? For many of us, the answer is probably yes. In reality, this may cause a child to overeat and lead to future weight issues. Or, you may have been rewarded with a bowl of ice cream for cleaning your plate, but that may have taught that veggies were the punishment dessert was the reward.

Instead, try this approach: Serve the meal with at least one food you know your child likes and will eat. Don't discuss eating habits, and clear the table when the meal is over – even if your child doesn't eat all his food. It's okay if he's still hungry after dinner. Don't become a short-order cook, preparing special meals just to appease your child. Don't make snacks available too close to mealtime – your child is more likely to eat if she's hungry

If she wants dessert, give it to her without fanfare, but consider serving fruit instead of a sugary treat. Save sugary treats for special occasions like birthdays. Treating dessert as a reward for finishing her vegetables risks teaching her that vegetables aren't enjoyable. Offering more nutritious desserts along with occasional treats like ice cream encourages healthy habits. It's also important to be a good role model. If your child sees you enjoying your meals, he's more likely to enjoy his as well.

How Can I Tell if My Child Is Eating Well Enough?

Remember, your job is to decide what nutritious foods to offer your child, and your child is the one in control of what he chooses to eat from what is offered and how much. Deciding for your child when he's had enough to eat does him a disservice.

Allow him to learn to recognize when he's hungry and when he's done. Otherwise, this could be setting him up for eating problems, such as obesity, overeating, or controlling food later on in life. Children are amazingly able to self-regulate. They may eat near nothing one day, but a lot of food the next day.

If you watch what your child eats over the course of a few weeks, you'll see that he does a good job of getting the nutrients he needs from different food groups (as long as you offer a variety). So, pull up a chair, relax, and enjoy your meal. If you do, your child will too!

Meal Planning – A meal should provide variety, with foods from each food group:

- Protein: Meat, fish, poultry, egg, cooked dried beans, seeds or nuts
- Vegetable: At least one vegetable
- Fruit: Add fruit to the menu as a dessert
- Milk, cheese, yogurt, or another form of calcium
- Grain: Dinner roll, rice, noodles etc.(preferably whole grains)

A nutritionally complete meal might contain only two food items, such as a tuna noodle casserole with peas and a glass of milk. Or everything could be separate, as with meat loaf, mashed potatoes, broccoli, bread and milk.

Snacking – Some parents believe that snacking is bad for their children and try to prevent eating between meals. Children's energy needs are high, and they have a limited stomach capacity. Therefore, they really need to eat every three to four hours. Try scheduling a snack time that is not too close to meal times and offer healthy foods. Avoid allowing your child to eat while walking around the house or in front of the TV. Have him sit at the table for his snack, when possible.

Let's Talk

Make mealtime pleasant. Don't argue, fight or scold at mealtimes, about food, about behavior, or anything else. It may be tempting to air complaints at mealtime when everyone is together. Don't do it! Turn mealtime into family time. Talk about how everyone's day went, discuss how school is going, and make plans for the weekend. This helps strengthen the bond between parent and child.

Recipe for Health:

Orange Smoothie:

Here is an easy and nutritious snack!

Full of calcium and Vitamin C!

And tasty too!

6 servings

Ingredients:

3 cups cold water

1 cup nonfat dry milk (powdered milk)

1 12 oz. can unsweetened orange juice concentrate

Directions:

Place water, milk powder, and orange juice concentrate in blender. Blend on high. Serve immediately. For a thicker smoothie add a handful of ice cubes before blending.

