



mealtimes: END THE BATTLE

Registered dietitian Linda Drummond from Nutritional Solutions sheds some light on a great approach to get your toddler to eat a variety of foods in a healthy way to ensure better eating habits. From eating together at set intervals, to avoiding tricks at the table, you can ensure your toddler gets a great start on lifelong healthy eating habits.

When your toddler eats well, he will have the nutrients he needs to grow, learn and develop. You can teach your toddler to eat well by offering him healthy choices and by being a good role model. If you eat a variety of healthy foods and stay active, chances are that your toddler will too. Given that we are such important role models to our children, we need to take a “do as I do” rather than a “do as I say” approach,

as our little ones are more likely to model our behaviour. If you feel that you aren't equipped to model a healthy lifestyle, seek out appropriate support to ensure that you are able to make lifestyle changes yourself.

10 Tips for better eating habits

With that said, a toddler may refuse to eat part or all of the family meal or only certain foods. This can be frustrating or

even cause you to worry about whether your child is getting the nutrients he needs. If mealtimes are a battle, try these 10 tips to help your toddler develop better eating habits.

1. Share the responsibility

Parents and children have different roles when it comes to feeding.

Your job is to decide:

- **which foods and drinks are served.** When you eat and serve a variety of healthy foods, your child will learn to eat these foods too.
- **when food is served.** When children eat at set times they are more likely to come to the table hungry and try new foods.
- **where food is served.** Children will eat healthier foods when you eat together at the table.

Your child's job is to decide:

- **if and how much to eat from the food and drinks you have served.** Trust that your child knows when he is hungry or full.

“Children do not eat well when they are pressured to eat.”

2. Eat together as often as possible

While our busy lives make this a challenge, making time to eat together as often as possible helps to teach your child healthy eating habits, table manners and how to use utensils. It also provides a time to model healthy eating.



3. Keep mealtimes pleasant and relaxed

Let your child eat with their fingers and provide age-appropriate utensils for him to learn to use. Don't expect good table manners yet; this will come with time. Making family mealtimes as positive as possible will ensure that your child will want to come to the table to eat.

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4. Set regular meal and snack times

Offer three meals and two to three snacks at regular times each day. Do not let your child graze or eat throughout the day. Offer only water in between meals and snacks. Even a little milk, juice or a few crackers can spoil your child's appetite. This will help your child come to the table hungry and ready to try new foods. If your child refuses a meal or does not eat anything in about 10 – 15 minutes, calmly remove his food. Let your child down from the table to play quietly while the rest of the family finishes eating.

5. Seat your child at the table securely in a high chair or booster seat for meals and snacks

Avoid distractions while your child is eating, as this will help him to focus on eating. Distractions can include the phone, TV, computer, radio and toys at or near the table.

6. Don't make separate meals for your child

Your child will not learn to eat a variety of food if you only serve what

he likes to eat. Always serve one food you know your child will eat so he or she won't go hungry.

7. Let your child decide if and how much to eat from the food you serve

Your child's appetite can vary depending on growth spurts, activity level, whether he is tired or ill, and where he is eating (e.g. at home or at school). Trust that your child's body will let him know when he is hungry or full. Give him smaller portions and let your child ask for more.

8. Avoid pressure, praise, rewards, tricks or punishment

Children do not eat well when they are pressured to eat; using any of these other means of encouraging your child to eat could lead to an unhealthy relationship with specific foods and should be discouraged.

9. Offer a variety of foods at each meal

Serve new foods:

- in small amounts along with familiar food
- when your child is healthy and hungry
- in different ways, e.g. carrots can be mashed, soft cooked, or grated into meat dishes

Don't be discouraged if your child does not like new foods on the first try. Sometimes it can take 15 – 20 tastes before a child accepts a new food.

“Trust that your child's body will let him know when he is hungry or full.”

10. Grow, pick, cook and shop for food together

Your child will be more open to trying new food that he has had a part in sourcing or making.

Healthy meal ideas*

- >> Cut up meatballs in tomato sauce with wholewheat pasta and gem squash with peas.
- >> Home-made fishcakes using salmon or pilchards with steamed baby marrow and carrots.
- >> Shredded chicken, baked sweet potato rounds with cooked broccoli and cauliflower florets with grated cheese.
- >> Scrambled or soft-boiled eggs, strips of wholegrain toast, with diced melon.
- >> Plain brown rice cakes with thinly spread smooth unsweetened nut butter, diced banana, and full-cream milk.

Healthy snack ideas*

- >> Avocado dip with baby tomatoes, sweet peppers and cucumber.
- >> Plain, unsweetened yoghurt with chopped blueberries, raspberries and strawberries.
- >> Homemade bran, carrot and pumpkin muffins with cheese cubes.

**To lower the risk of choking, choose the right size and texture of food for your toddler.*

Please note that this information is not meant to replace advice from your medical doctor or individual counselling with a registered dietitian. It is intended for educational and informational purposes only. ♥

References

Tips on Feeding Your Picky Toddler or Preschooler. Dietitians of Canada, 2010.
Tackling Obesity Through the Healthy Child Programme. A framework for action. Mary Rudolf, 2009.