



Healthy Choices

Start Now



Help Your Child Become a Healthy Eater

The amount of food your child eats will vary from day to day and meal to meal, according to how hungry they are, how active they are and whether they are going through a growth spurt. Their appetite may also change when they are excited or tired. Letting your child decide whether to eat and how much to eat at meal and snack times will help them to become a healthy eater.

Tips to help make meal and snack times easier:

Provide the food and let your child do the rest!

Prepare one meal for the whole family and let your child choose what and how much to eat from what you have prepared. Let your child eat as much or as little as they want.

As a parent or caregiver you decide:

- **What** foods to offer
- **When** to offer meals and snacks
- **Where** your child will eat

Your child decides:

- **Which** foods to eat (if any)
- **How much** to eat

Your child's body will tell them how much to eat. This means some days your child might not eat very much at all, but on other days, they will eat more than usual. Over time, the amount your child eats tends to average out to provide the calories and nutrients they need.

If your child does not like a food, that's okay. If you allow your child to say "no" to a food, it helps them to feel comfortable to say "yes" more often. Allow your child to politely spit out food they don't like.



Provide healthy meals and snacks every two to three hours

Young children need three small meals and two to three snacks each day. Offer meals and snacks at around the same time each day (children like routine).

- Between meal and snack times offer water for thirst and encourage your child to be active so they will be hungry for the next meal or snack.
- Meals should include foods from the three food groupings in Canada's food guide. Include food from at least two food groupings for snacks.
- Always have a food from Canada's food guide on the table that your child likes so that there is something nutritious that they will eat.
- Snack time is an important time for your child to get good nutrition – offer healthy choices at most snacks.

Eat together, turn off the television and model healthy eating

Eat together as a family whenever possible. Make mealtime a relaxing time with pleasant conversation. Avoid distractions at the table such as TV, toys or taking phone calls. Children learn by watching. Let them see you enjoy a variety of foods; they will be more likely to try them. If you avoid a food, they may not want to try it either.

Offer child-size portions

Children have small stomachs and fill up quickly, so they only need small amounts of food at a time. Your child may not even try a bite of food if the portion looks too big. A child size portion is one quarter to one half of an adult size portion. If your child is still hungry after finishing, they can ask for more.

Children can feed themselves

Offer food in a way that your child can eat on their own. Cut up foods so your child can use their fingers or a spoon or fork easily. Expect a mess, especially with younger children.

Offer new foods many times

Offer new food options with food your child already likes. If your child does not want to try a new food, that's okay. Try again without pressure on another day. Children may need to be offered a new food 15 or more times before they will try it.

Do not pressure your child to eat

A healthy relationship with food in the long term is more important than eating a certain food now.

- Do not use food to bribe, reward or punish your child.
- Allow your child to leave the table when they are finished eating.
- It is hard for children to stay at the table for a long time; 20 to 30 minutes is usually enough time for children to eat.

Offer milk at meals

Unflavoured milk or fortified soy beverage for children over two years of age are good sources of vitamin D which helps build strong bones and teeth. To meet the needed 500 mL (two cups) of milk a day, offer 125 mL (half cup) portions at meals and most snacks. If your child is thirsty between meals and snacks, water is the best choice.

Avoid offering juice

Avoid offering juice; offer fruit instead. If you choose to offer juice, offer pasteurized 100 per cent pure fruit juice with no added sugar and limit to 125 mL (half cup) a day. Avoid offering fruit-flavoured drinks or pop.

Allow your child to help

Children are more likely to eat when they have helped prepare the meal or snack. Young children can help wash and tear lettuce, scrub potatoes or stir batter.

A relaxed approach to food is the best way to help your child be a healthy eater.

