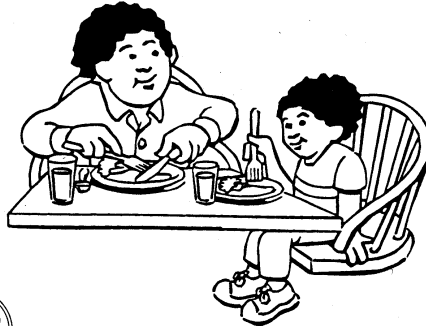


Feeding Your Preschool Child

From two to five years old



Renfrew County & District Health Unit

Preschoolers -what they are like and what they need.

Eating is one of the many skills your child learns during his or her first 5 years. Parents can help children develop good eating habits that will continue after they have grown up. It is easier to help your child develop good habits now than to change bad habits later! This booklet will help you to know what to expect from preschoolers at meal time and about good nutrition for them.

Kinds of foods Children need the same kinds of foods as adults, but in smaller amounts. You can make sure that your child is getting a healthy diet by planning meals that include foods from the four food groups outlined in this pamphlet. Offer a variety of foods to get your child used to different tastes.

Appetite A child's appetite may vary from day to day for no reason that you can see. It will also vary from year to year depending on how fast he or she is growing. After one year of age growth slows down, so a toddler may want less to eat at 2 years than he did at 18 months. Knowing this will help you to be less concerned or anxious about how much she is eating. Children are good at knowing how much food they need. Here's a good rule of thumb: "you control the quality, they control the quantity".

It doesn't help to force or bribe! Do not use food as a reward or a bribe. A relaxed attitude will go a long way toward making mealtime a pleasant experience. Try to keep a calm and casual view about what and how your child eats. Set a good example and your toddler will follow along....

Eating problems? Here's how to cope...

Refusal to eat . . .

- ◆ A healthy child will not starve himself. He or she wants more independence and eating is one activity where "No" may be a favourite word.
- ◆ Involve your child in choosing, making and serving food, for example, pouring his own milk, making sandwiches.
- ◆ Remove distractions, like the T.V.
- ◆ Spend some quiet time with your child before eating (read a book or do a puzzle together).
- ◆ Remove the meal after a reasonable length of time (20 to 30 minutes) and tell her calmly that she will get no more food until the next meal or snack.
- ◆ Offer smaller servings so that a finicky appetite is not overwhelmed.

Refusal of new foods

- ◆ Encourage one bite to taste the new food but then casually remove the food and try it again in a few days. Do not assume that he doesn't like it. Many children will refuse a new food the first time.
- ◆ Let the child touch and smell the new food. Be prepared to find bits of food on the floor, chair, everywhere!
- ◆ Try only one new food at a time and serve it with a favourite food. .
- ◆ Serve a new food when he is hungry and happy, not angry or ill.
- ◆ Serve it in a different form the second time, e.g. raw vegetables instead of cooked. .
- ◆ Children, like adults, will have foods they like and dislike. These preferences may change as they grow older .

Food Jags . . . (or peanut butter for breakfast, lunch and supper)

- ◆ .Serve his favourite food but continue serving your family a variety of foods. Offer them to the child too, but don't force him.

Dawdling

- ◆ Toddlers are often more interested in exploring food than eating.
- ◆ They are not concerned about time the way adults are, so be patient.
- ◆ Allow your child to continue eating alone at the end of the meal or begin eating before the rest of the family. .Offer smaller servings-
- ◆ .Make sure he is not overtired at mealtime.

Vitamin supplements Eating a variety of foods is the best way for children to get the nutrients they need. Most children do not need vitamin supplements. Usually eating jags or poor appetites do not last long enough to put children at risk of illness. If you wonder whether your child needs vitamin supplements ask your doctor. Consult your doctor or call the Renfrew County & District Health Unit nutritionist if your child follows a strict vegetarian diet or doesn't drink any milk or eat cheese

Foods that can cause choking

Some foods are dangerous because children can choke on them.

Avoid these foods until your child is three years old:

- Nuts and seeds,
- popcorn,
- hard candies,
- small pieces of hard vegetables and fruit.
- small candies,
- chips,

Some foods are a common cause of choking, but can be prepared in a way that is less of a risk:

- whole grapes can be sliced lengthwise
- hot dogs (weiners) can be sliced lengthwise
- hard vegetables like carrots and turnip can be shredded or chopped .hard fruit pieces can be shredded or chopped
- peanut butter can be spread thinly (use the smooth type)

Always make sure that children are sitting quietly while they eat. It can be dangerous to run, laugh or talk with food in the mouth.

Snacks Snacks help keep children going from one meal to the next. Snacks that are not sweet are best because they will not promote tooth decay and usually are healthier. If sweet or sticky foods like raisins or fruit snacks are given be sure that the child's teeth are brushed immediately after eating. See "Super Snacks for Kids" for some great snack ideas.

"Junk" Food Foods like candy, pop, fruit flavoured drinks, chips and chocolate bars etc. can be eaten occasionally. Children will want to eat these foods when they see others eating them, so set limits for the whole family. Serve nutritious foods as special treats: kiwi fruit, cherry tomatoes, melon slices, individual cheeses and fancy crackers are examples.

Artificial Sweeteners Children need energy (calories) for growing. Low calorie foods made with artificial sweeteners should not take the place of nutritious foods in a child's menu.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

For more information about feeding your child and the rest of your family:

Feeding Your Preschooler: Tasty nutrition for kids two to six by Louise Lambert-Légace (Stoddart Publishers/Toronto, 1993).

Child of Mine: Feeding with Love and Good Sense by Ellyn Satter (Bull Publishing Company/California, 1986).

Also from the Renfrew County & District Health Unit: Super Snacks for Kids (pamphlet); Enjoy Your Toddler classes provide information on a variety of parenting topics depending on the needs of participants; Shopping For Health grocery store tours are a hands-on, practical way of learning to improve your eating habits and learn about food safety. They are provided free for any group of seven or more people.

If you have questions, contact Healthy Lifestyle Programs at the Renfrew County and

District Health Unit, 7 International Drive, Pembroke ON K8A 6W5 (735-8653 or 1-800-267-1097)