

Feeding Tips For Preschool Children

Feeding Your Preschool Child

Children go through many stages as they grow. Their eating habits are often affected by these stages. The years between 1 and 5 can be a very busy period of learning, so it is not unusual for preschoolers to have times when eating does not interest them.

In general, when children are active and growing steadily, a small appetite is nothing to worry about. However, sometimes a loss of appetite can be a warning. The child could be ill, tense, or worried (especially if there are many arguments in the home). If a child never eats and does not seem to be growing normally they should be seen by a doctor.

- ❖ Sometimes children quit eating to get attention. One solution to this problem is to give a child attention, before a meal. Involving them in pleasant conversation while eating also helps them eat.
- ❖ Children also quit eating when they do not get enough physical activity. Children need some physical activity every day, preferably outside.
- ❖ Normal preschool eating behavior happens because children are learning to be independent. You can help your child feel more independent by giving him a choice whenever possible. Choices can be simple and inexpensive. Cooked or raw carrots. Scrambled eggs or boiled eggs. A plain peanut butter sandwich or peanut butter and jelly.
- ❖ Foods that let the child eat by himself also helps him feel independent. Prepare foods that can be eaten with the fingers.
- ❖ Children like to eat foods they have helped prepare. Give your child a simple job to do to prepare food like taking apples out of the refrigerator or tearing lettuce for a salad.
- ❖ Children are often easily distracted from eating and sometimes forget to finish a meal if the TV is on. Turn the TV off during mealtime.
- ❖ Children learn eating habits by watching others eat. Children are more likely to try new foods if they see others eating and enjoying them.

- ❖ Children eat better when calm. Have a few minutes of quiet rest time before eating and keep mealtime conversation pleasant.
- ❖ Choking often happens because children are lying down, running, jumping, playing, laughing, or crying while eating. To make eating safer, be sure your children sit quietly while eating.
- ❖ No matter what, you may still find yourself in a "me" against "you" situation. If you find yourself in a difficult situation try:
 - ❖ Distracting your child by talking about something besides food, such as something happening outside. Children have short memories: the child may soon forget and eat without further argument. Playing a game such as "Let's see who can drink their milk first."
 - ❖ As a final resort, take the plate away. Do not force a child to eat a disliked food or when not hungry.

Adapted from "Food For Preschoolers," Washington State University Cooperative Extension Service.

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