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## Young Children's Eating Habits

Many adults have difficulty with overeating, consuming too much salt and cholesterol, eating junk food, and keeping irregular meal times. In most cases, these eating habits are developed as children. It's important, therefore, to help your own children develop sound, healthy eating habits, right from the start.

Here are seven tips to set them on the right track:

- 1.) You should choose what your children eat, but they should choose how much. Frequently, preschoolers will prefer one good-sized meal a day. At other meals, they may be picky eaters.
- 2.) When it comes to food, children have likes and dislikes, just as we all do. While it's good to encourage a variety in your children's tastes, it helps to serve food that appeals to them. Many different wholesome foods are available today, so it's not that hard to satisfy your children's tastes and still provide balanced nutrition.
- 3.) Snacks between meals are fine, but they don't have to be candy, cookies, potato chips, or soft drinks. Provide your children healthy snack alternatives, such as milk, fruit juice, raw vegetables, dry cereals, and dry or fresh fruit.
- 4.) Make foods look good to your children. For example, some children don't like casseroles, so you probably should serve them separate foods. Also, many children like colorful foods, such as jello. They also like a variety of textures, so try to combine different foods that are chewy, crisp, or soft. Avoid meals that have a single texture.
- 5.) Serve the food so that it's easy for small children to manage. One example would be to serve soup in a cup. (Of course, always check the temperature before serving.) It's also a good idea to give children bite-sized pieces of food that they can pick up with their fingers. And be sure that small children have chairs that fit them so that they are comfortable and can easily reach their food.
- 6.) Consider that grownups deserve an enjoyable meal, too. It's normal for young children to go through stages of wanting to decide what, where, and when they will eat. But if they make family meals tense or unhappy because they're unhappy, you may want to serve them separately and at an earlier time.
- 7.) Last but not least, think about your own eating habits. Remember that children copy their parents. If you refuse to eat many kinds of food, eat lots of fried or fatty foods, and snack on empty calories between meals, then your children are likely to do the same. But if you eat a variety of wholesome foods from all five food groups, eat moderately, stick to healthy snacks

between meals, and have meals at regular times, your children will eventually imitate that, too. Don't forget that parents are the most influential teachers their children will ever have.

If you have serious concerns about your children's eating habits, consult your health care professional.



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