



Are you doing your job?

The job of feeding children can be hard. Children can be fussy and refuse the food we've worked hard to prepare. They often prefer junk food to more nutritious options. Too many children today are gaining too much weight.

What is a parent to do? In teaching children to be healthy eaters, be clear about your own responsibilities and the role of your child. The clearer you make this division, the healthier the eating habits of your family. Your job is to plan and prepare balanced meals and healthy snacks for your family, using a wide variety of foods. Avoid asking your child what she would like to eat for each meal. This can turn you into a short-order cook, making a separate meal for each family member. You also decide when to serve food. It is best if food is served at regular times. It helps if you have some easy meals in mind for those times when you are tired or busy. If you have frozen food in the freezer or quick menu items such as eggs, you'll be ready for those times.

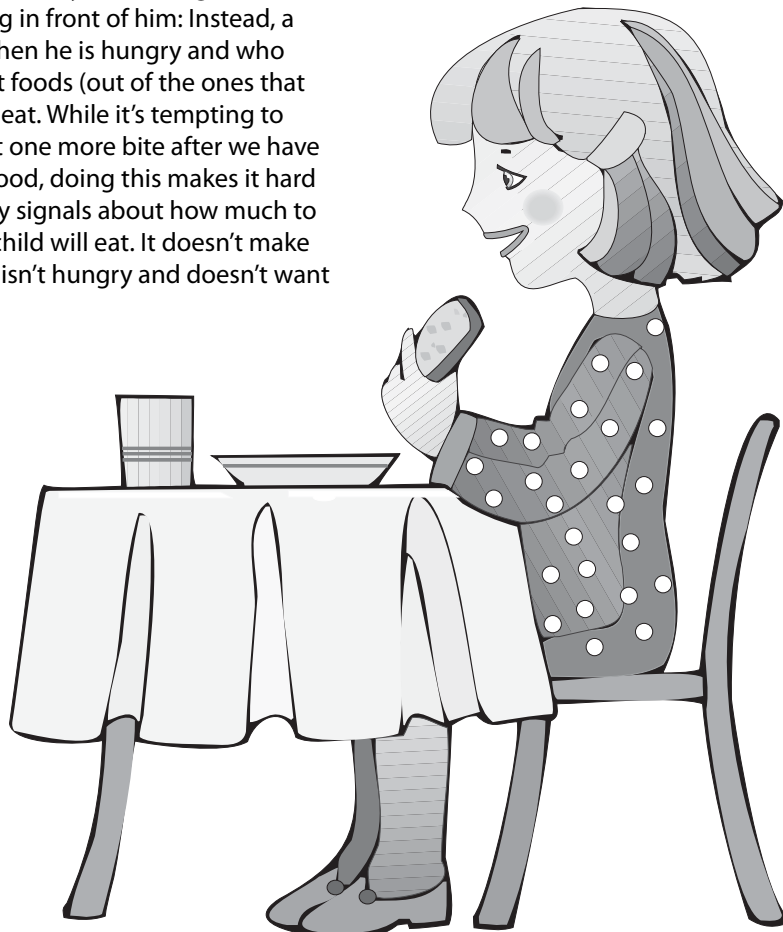
The child's job is to eat what his body needs. A good eater is not one who eats everything in front of him: Instead, a good eater is one who eats when he is hungry and who listens to his body about what foods (out of the ones that you have served) he needs to eat. While it's tempting to encourage children to eat just one more bite after we have worked so hard to make the food, doing this makes it hard for a child to listen to her body signals about how much to eat. Trust that a truly hungry child will eat. It doesn't make you a bad parent if your child isn't hungry and doesn't want to eat dinner tonight.

Portion Size

Nutritionists tell us we have an obesity epidemic in our country. One of the problems is an unrealistic idea of appropriate portion size. Our restaurants are offering larger portion sizes and even supersizing the portions.

Most Americans serve children portion sizes that are too large. This can be overwhelming and can encourage overeating. For children under the age of five, a rough portion size is a tablespoon per age. So, a portion of peas for a one-year-old is one tablespoon. Start with a small plate for your child and offer small portions of each of the foods that are on your menu. This gives you a chance to save the leftovers and can help your child get used to a new food without so much waste.

When a child has a favorite food at your meal, offer it in a reasonable portion size and make sure you offer other foods as well. Sometimes we accidentally encourage children to eat only a limited number of foods by offering their favorites in large portion sizes, which reduces their appetite for other foods.



Fast food control

Fast food is a great convenience for busy parents, but a meal at a fast food restaurant can have all the calories that you and your child would need for an entire day! How can you make better choices for yourself and your children at fast food restaurants?

Newer choices are becoming available at fast food restaurants. Some are offering children's menus with a choice between fruit or fries. Others have expanded their menus to include yogurt and fruit as well as salads.

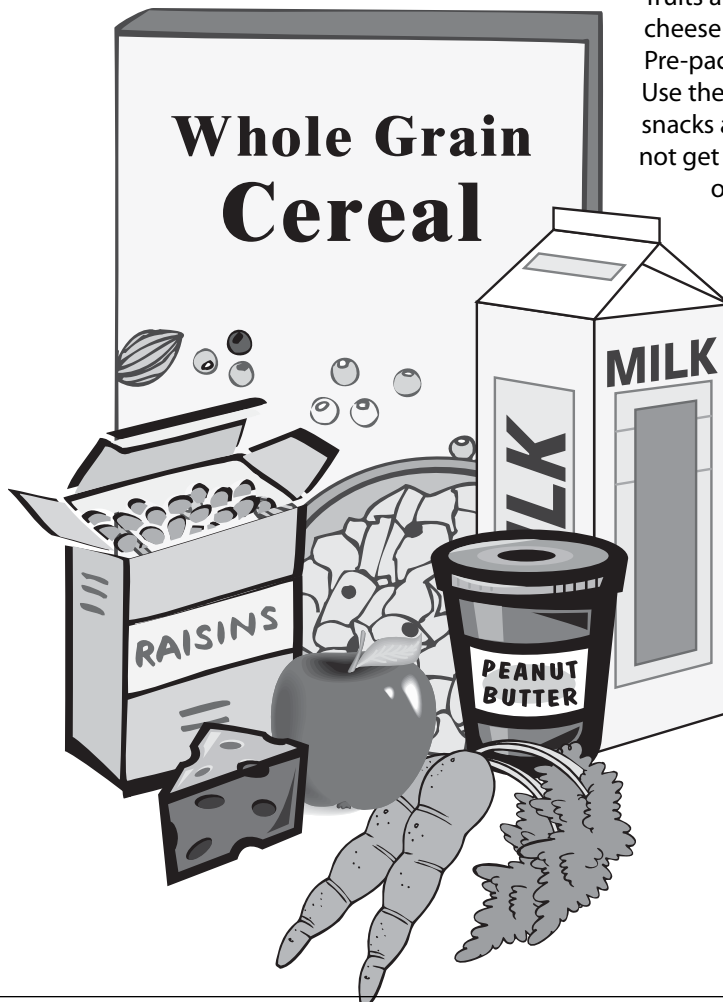
It is often recommended to not buy the children's meal. Instead, pick items like sandwiches and salads. Consider starting with a shared salad and having other menu items afterwards. Offer to share a portion of fries with your children so that they can enjoy them at a more reasonable portion size. Children don't need all the extra sugar in soda. Pass on the soda and order milk or water instead.



The importance of snacks

Because young children have little tummies, they can't just eat three meals a day. They need snacks. To get all the calories they need in one day, young children must eat snacks to meet their nutritional needs. Snacks should not just be empty calories.

Snacks are a great time to help children get their needed fruits and vegetables. Vegetables and dip or fruit and cheese make great snacks that are simple to prepare. Pre-packaged snacks are often high in salt and fat. Use these foods sparingly rather than regularly. Offer snacks at a regular time to make sure your child does not get too hungry. Take snacks with you when you are on the go, so you keep little tummies filled and children happy.



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