



The Basics of **Caring for Children** *In Your Home*

Kids and Food

Eating times can be happy ones for both children and adults or they can be times to go to battle. What are they like in your child care home? Do you have “picky” eaters? Kids who always play with their food instead of eating? Do you feel you need to force children to eat?

**Children of different ages have very different eating styles and habits.
A lot of this is linked to the way they are growing and developing.**

Infants

Infants will let you know when they are hungry and when they are full. Each baby will show you in his or her own way. It is important to follow their signs. Babies need to know that you will feed them when they are ready to eat and stop when they are full. Keeping baby on her own time schedule is important to letting her know that you will meet her needs.

Make feeding time pleasant and relaxed. Babies should be held as they are fed. Never place an infant in an infant seat and prop the bottle.

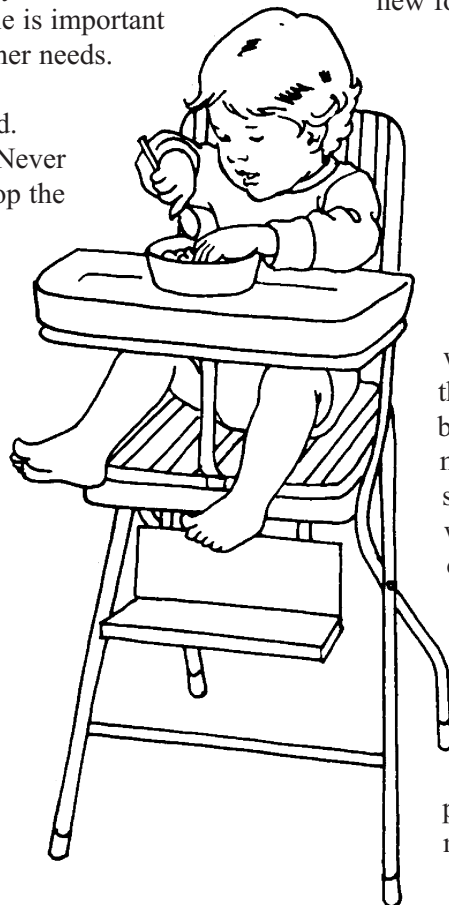
As the baby gets older, help her to feed herself as much as possible. Remember: this will be messy! Babies need to learn about their food. They do this by putting it in their hair, smearing it on their faces, throwing it, and dropping it from their chairs.

Toddlers

Between the ages of ten to twelve months, toddlers slow down in their growing. That means they may not eat as much as before. This is ok. They become very interested in the things

around them and not as interested in food. They are also learning to say “No.” Sometimes they choose not to eat to be in control.

Many toddlers don’t like new foods at first. This is part of learning. Most children learn to like new foods over time.



Don’t worry if a child doesn’t eat much one day. They eat as much as they need.

Preschoolers

Preschoolers are learning to eat with forks and spoons. But when they are really hungry, they may go back to eating with their hands. You may find they are fussy about things, such as only eating sandwiches which are cut in triangles or only drinking from a certain color cup.

Sitting down to a large plate filled with food looks like a large job to a child. Give young children small servings of food (1 – 2 tablespoons) on small plates. They can always ask for more if they are still hungry.

Who's in Charge?

Adults are in charge of what the children eat and when they eat.

- It's best to feed infants when they are hungry.
- Serve regular meals and snacks to toddlers, preschoolers, and school-age children.

Children are in charge of whether they eat and how much.

- Hungry children will eat.

A hungry child will eat.

Snacks are Important

Children have small stomachs. They often can't hold enough food to keep them going from one meal to the next. Regular meals and snacks give children the energy they need to keep them going during the day. Plan snack time for 1 to 1½ hours after a meal.

(For more information on planning snacks, call Better Kid Care at 1-800-452-9108 to order the video learn-at-home unit, "Snack Time...it's more than juice and crackers.")

Trying New Foods

Some children are ready and willing to try new foods, other children won't touch them. It's important that children are given chances to try new foods. It's up to the child to decide if he will try a new food. It's ok if he doesn't want to. But don't stop. Wait a week or two, then serve the food again. A child often needs to taste a new food many times before she eats it.

Never force a child to try a new food. If you have a "one bite" rule, remember that is for tasting a new food, not eating it. Sometimes children will test a new food by putting it in their mouths and spitting it out. This is normal behavior, especially for toddlers. This kind of taste testing helps children learn to eat new foods. Teach children to place the food they don't want to swallow on their own plate.

Do not "reward" a child with a favorite food for trying a new food (such as ice cream for eating peas). Food "rewards" make the children want the "reward" (ice cream). Not the peas!

Snack time is a good time for trying new foods. Serve something the children like with something new. This way the children can choose not to try the new food or try a little of something new with a food they already like.

One of the best ways to get children to try new foods is to allow them to help make the food. Children want to try foods that they help prepare.

When Children Won't Eat

Sometimes children won't eat because:

- they aren't hungry
- they want to be in control

Children have the right to decide if they want to eat or not. You can offer one stand-by food, if children don't like what is being served. Never force a child to eat. If a child is not hungry at meal time, tell her it's ok. She may be hungry when it's time for snack.

Let children decide when they are hungry or full.

Playing with Food

Infants and toddlers learn about their food by touching and playing with it. This is a good thing for young children. Serve only small amounts to young children so it isn't so messy.

When older children play with their food or act silly at the table, it's often a sign they aren't hungry. Give the child the choice to stay at the table and eat or go play with a quiet activity. Be sure to serve a snack 1 to 1½ hours later.

If you would like to read more about Food and Kids, call your local Cooperative Extension Office to borrow the book *How to Get Your Kids to Eat...But Not too Much* by Ellen Satter from the county resource library.

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