



A nutrition newsletter for families with children under five

ISSUE 12

Welcome to the 12th edition of "Food Matters" a nutrition newsletter for families with children under five. If you would like to know more about a specific nutrition issue, please let us know by contacting the Health Information Centre, Women's and Children's Hospital on (08) 8161 6875. Childcare centres can contact TeethSmart for multiple copies of this newsletter ph: (08) 8295 2311 or fax: (08) 8294 6103.



Is it Food or Feud?

By Kaye Buckley, Social Worker, Junction Community Centre and Jane Taylor and Alison Smith, Children's Health Development Foundation

Food refusal is a common event that is part of growing up. If your child is going through this stage, it is best not to worry and keep in mind that children have small appetites. Depending on their activity, children will eat different amounts on different days, so expect their intake to vary during the week. Also, your child may not eat if they are tired or if meals are late. As long as your fussy child is happy and healthy you need not worry - a healthy child will not starve because of food refusal. In this article we will discuss some tips to manage the food feud.

Sharing food

Letting children serve themselves can encourage them to choose the foods they like to eat. This is because children know when they are hungry, when they are not, and what tastes they like.

- Sharing food allows children to decide what to eat and how much to eat.
- Parents and carers still have control over what foods are eaten and at what time.

Serve small meals and snacks

Children have small stomachs and short attention spans.

- Serve children small meals throughout the day.
- Limit drinks to 2-3 cups of milk a day and no more than 1 cup of diluted juice.
- Allow unlimited drinking water during and after meals.

Avoid distractions

Avoiding distractions can help your child eat the food that is in front of them.

- Turn off the television.
- Put pets outside and toys away.

Eating only when hungry

Giving food to children to calm, comfort or quieten them can create problems. Children may then want food when they are feeling sad or angry, or they may be naughty to try and get food. Avoid this trap by comforting children with non-food rewards like music, a hug or an enjoyable activity.

Children may not always finish their meals, which is OK. Teaching them to eat only when they are hungry means trusting them to know when they are full and when they are hungry.

- Keep fuss about food refusal to a minimum.

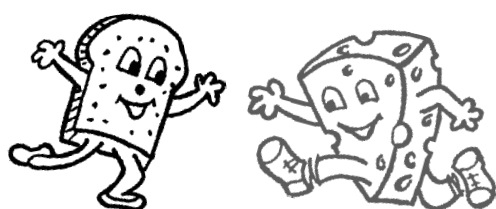
- Let your child decide when they've had enough to eat.

Encouraging new foods

- Praise children when they eat well.
- Praise children when they try new foods.
- Talk about a new food before it is served to increase interest.
- Ask children to help plan and cook meals.
- Be patient. It may take many meals before a child is willing to try a new food.

Hot tips for parents and carers

- Let your child decide the serve sizes. Children have small stomachs, so they eat less in a sitting.
- Cut back on junk food in the house. If it is not in the house then your child cannot fill up on it when at home.
- Allow treats sometimes.
- Try to be patient with your child.
- Do not try to force your child to eat or punish them for not eating, it can just make things harder in the end.
- Do not let mealtimes become a battle. Food is to be enjoyed together. If your child sees you enjoying your meal, they are more likely to copy.



How to make food more exciting

- Offer children a choice of healthy foods during meals so they can show some independence by deciding what to eat out of a healthy selection.
- Put foods in the centre of the table. This allows children to serve themselves. (Beware - things could get a little messy, so put down some newspaper or a plastic tablecloth!)
- Make sure that meal times are relaxed and don't make a fuss over refused food. Remove any refused food, cover it and put it in the fridge. If your child is hungry later, serve them the same plate of food. You may need to do this a few times before they will start to eat at mealtimes.
- For something different, serve meals that children can 'make' themselves...see recipes below.
- Having friends over to eat can make the meal more exciting and encourage your child to eat.
- Occasionally serve meals in different places. For example, eat a meal at an outside table in summer. Have a picnic in the garden or local park for a special treat - you can relax about any mess that is made!
- Also try offering foods in different ways. If fresh fruit is refused, try offering it frozen (grapes and bananas freeze well). If steamed vegetables are ignored, see if they attract in a stir fry.
- To get your child interested in food, include it in their playtime. Try growing sprouts, herbs or tomatoes. Start a list of foods your child would like to try and work your way through the list together.
- For a treat make the food into interesting or different shapes. For example, use an ice cream scoop to put mashed vegetables onto the plate and arrange the rest of the food around the 'mountain'. You can also cut vegetables into different shapes and sizes to add interest.
- You can put lots of different fruits into fruit smoothies. Add fruit into a blender with milk and yoghurt and mix until it is smooth and creamy. This is a nutritious way to help children to meet their daily requirements of fruit and milk.



Mexican Burritos

- Warm any flat bread in a microwave, or wrap in foil and heat in the oven until soft.
- In the meantime, prepare the different burrito fillings. Include savoury mince (beef or chicken), shredded lettuce, chopped fresh tomato, mild salsa, grated cheese, natural yoghurt and mashed kidney beans.
- To make burritos, spoon fillings in a line onto the warm flat bread. Fold one side of the bread over the filling, then fold up about 5 cms of one end. Fold over the other side of the bread to complete the burrito (one end should remain open).

Baked potatoes

- Dry roast small potatoes in a very hot oven until golden on the outside and very soft on the inside. Allow to cool a little before serving.
- Prepare various toppings for the potatoes, limiting the number to around five. Topping ideas include: chopped ham, grated cheese, sour cream, grated carrot, coleslaw, grated cucumber, natural yoghurt, finely sliced capsicum, chopped fresh tomato, tomato sauce, pineapple pieces, sultanas, creamed corn.
- Lay out potatoes and toppings on the table and watch the kids create their own masterpiece!

Winning the food battle

Nutritionists from Noarlunga Health Services answer your questions.

Q: My 2 year old son will only eat peanut butter sandwiches. I am frustrated by the amount of food wasted when he won't try anything new. What can I do? Philip, Trinity Gardens.

A: Your son is at an age when he is starting to be more independent and saying 'no' to food is a normal part of this. Sometimes children use 'no' as a way of having some control over what is happening around them. Remember that if a child is hungry, they will eat. A healthy child will not starve because of food refusal.

Sometimes children won't eat for reasons other than being stubborn! Check on these things first:

- What food or drinks has the child had before dinner? If your child has filled up on snacks or drinks just before dinner, then they won't be hungry. Cutting back on snacks and drinks close to meals may help.
- How much food is served? Children have a stomach about the size of their fist and large serves can be off-putting. Try serving small amounts. They can always come back for seconds. There are lots of different ways to deal with food refusal. Sometimes the simplest is to serve the same food for the whole family. This is a good example to your toddler, who sees everyone eating the food and is likely to copy. It also cuts down on waste because you do not have to make separate meals. For more information, contact the dietitian/nutritionist at your local community health centre or hospital



The SA Child Care Nutrition Partnership aims to promote good nutrition for all South Australian children in early childhood services. Partners include representatives from Child Care Associations, Department of Education and Children's Services, TAFE, Gowrie Training Centre, SA Dental Service, child care centre cooks, Women's & Children's Hospital (Department of Nutrition and Food Services, the Children's Health Development Foundation and Eat Well SA), The Cancer Council South Australia, Community Health Services and Department of Human Services.

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