

Eating Habits of Children

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Parents are always concerned about whether or not their children are eating enough of the right foods. Toddlers and preschoolers, especially, tend to be very picky eaters as they struggle for independence. Common feeding challenges in young children are:

New foods. Forcing a child to eat a particular food usually creates a bad association with that food that can last for years. Try different ways to prepare the food; stimulate interest by allowing your child to help with small cooking tasks. If it is a vegetable, let your child select it at the market or grow it at home.

Small appetite. A child who doesn't eat much needs to eat nutritiously. Offer small sandwiches, fresh fruits and vegetables or leftovers as snacks. Avoid letting your child satisfy their appetites on low nutrient foods.

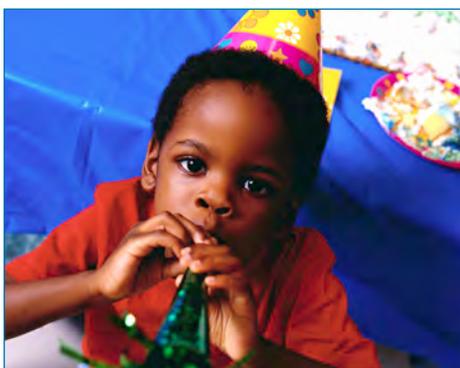
Cavities. A good diet is the first step to cavity-resistant teeth. A nutrient shortage at the time of enamel formation will cause imperfections in a tooth's surface. Limit your child's intake of sweet, sticky foods such as candy, dried fruit, and cookies. High sugar foods do less harm if eaten with meals.

Food jags. It is common for a preschooler to go on food jags and want the same food over and over. As long as the food is not a

high sugar or other empty-calorie food, allow the child his/her food choice and hope that the phase passes quickly.

Overweight. If your child is overweight, now is the time for action. Observe your child's eating and exercise habits. Watch portion sizes and snacking habits, and activity levels. For young children, weight control requires slowing the rate of weight gain rather than losing pounds. While monitoring food intake is important, also see that your child participates in active games that require running, jumping or skipping.

Spills, use of fingers. This is normal behavior for toddlers and preschoolers. Coordination is not yet well developed, so fingers work better than forks. Feeling food with the hands is one way toddlers explore their environment. When mealtime spills occur, handle them calmly and matter-of-factly. Concentrating too much on your child's bad behavior may cause him/her to seek attention by intentionally spilling or misbehaving.



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