

Changing Yuck To Yum

(One To Five Years)



Do you feel like your child is a picky eater? Are you trying different ways to get your child to eat or try new foods? Would you like mealtimes to be more relaxed and enjoyable? You are not alone. Parents often have these concerns.

Feeding behaviours that seem problematic may actually be normal and expected for your child's age. Feeding practices have also changed over time so how you were fed as a child may be different from what is recommended now.

Parents Play An Important Role

How you approach feeding will have an impact on your child's eating behaviours and the mealtime experience for the entire family.

While there may be times you think your child is not eating enough, it is important to trust your child to manage their appetite.

When you allow your child to decide how much to eat (follow their hunger and fullness signs), it helps them to develop a positive relationship with food.

Your child's appetite is affected by many things, including:

- Activity level
- Mood or energy level (e.g., excited or tired)
- Growth needs (e.g., growth spurts)
- Teething

It is expected that their appetite will change from day to day or even meal to meal. Food likes and dislikes can also change quickly.

Practical Tips You Can Start Today

Establish a meal and snack routine

- Offer 3 meals and 2 - 3 snacks each day
- Offer a healthy meal or snack every 2 1/2 - 3 hours
- Avoid letting your child eat between meals and snacks
- Water can be offered between meals

Consider but do not cater

- The more you cater to your child's likes and dislikes, the pickier they will become

Trust your child to know

- How much to eat
- Which foods to eat from what you offer
- Use Canada's Food Guide to help plan meals and snacks. Include a fruit or vegetable (or both) at meals and snacks
- Offer the same food as the rest of the family and modify the texture as needed
- Include at least one food your child likes
- Try family-style eating (place food on the table in platters and let your child self-serve)
- Do not go back to the kitchen to get different food if your child refuses to eat

Offer child-size portions

- Since small stomachs fill up quickly, offer portions that are about one quarter to one half of an adult portion size
- They will ask for more if they are hungry

What and how much they drink matters

Drinking juice or too much milk, including between meals, can lower their appetite for food and put them at risk for tooth decay. Since drinking from a bottle can also put your child at risk for tooth decay, offer drinks in an open cup.

Water - Offer as much as your child would like. Water will not lower their appetite so it can be offered between meals to satisfy their thirst.

Milk - If your child is not breastfeeding, offer 500 mL (two cups) of milk a day to help meet their calcium, vitamin D and protein needs. Offer small servings of 125 mL (half cup) in an open cup when they eat a meal or snack. Limit milk to no more than 750 mL (3 cups) a day.

Serve full-fat milk (3.25% milk fat) milk until age two. Then you can switch to skim, 1% or 2% milk or fortified, unflavoured, unsweetened soy beverage. Since plant-based beverages, such as fortified soy, rice, almond or coconut are generally lower in calories, essential fats and protein, avoid using them in place of breastmilk or cow's milk before two years of age.

100% juice - Limit or avoid as it is high in sugar and offers little nutrition.

All other drinks - Avoid

Let your child feed themselves

- Cut up foods so your child can use their fingers, a spoon or fork easily
- Avoid placing food into their mouth for them
- Expect a mess; it will get better in time
- While food pouches are convenient when on the go, they don't allow children to practice feeding themselves
- Your child does not need ultra-processed convenience products like rice rusks, fish crackers, children's cookies or food puffs

Let them say “no thank you” or “more please”

- If you allow your child to say “no” to food, they will be more likely to say “yes”
- Allow them to be in control of their appetite
- If your child says that they do not like the food, say “Oh, okay,” or ignore it. Avoid looking disappointed or upset

- Let them politely spit out disliked foods

Remove distractions

- Even though it can feel like your child will sit longer, distractions do not help over time
- Avoid use of the TV, tablet, computer, cell phone, toys or any other electronic device
- Avoid texting, talking on the phone or using electric devices yourself at the table

Eat together as a family

- Role model healthy eating
- Enjoy the time spent together
- Talk and pay attention to your child without making them the centre of attention
- Let your child leave the table when they are full (15 to 20 minutes is usually enough time to eat). Limit meal and snack time to 30 minutes

Keep mealtime relaxing, without pressure

- Avoid forcing or bribing and remember it can take many times for your child to learn about and enjoy a new food
- Rules such as “take one bite” or “at least taste it” are forms of pressure
- Saying “good girl, you ate it” or “you will grow strong if you eat it” are also forms of pressure
- Using food as a reward or withholding dessert until your child eats all their meal are not strategies that work in the long run. Instead, if you have dessert, offer it regardless of how much your child eats
- Avoid commenting about how little or how much your child eats. Instead, have pleasant conversation about other topics

Get them involved in the kitchen

- Invite your child into the kitchen. Cooking is an important life skill and your child may be more likely to eat the food if they made it
- Little hands can help measure, add and stir ingredients

If Your Child Does Not Like To Eat Vegetables

It may take time for your child to enjoy eating vegetables. Be patient as they learn and try some of the tips below.

Tips for parents

- Do not pressure, bribe or beg your child to eat vegetables
- Offer small servings of vegetables at each meal (one to two tablespoons), but do not insist that your child eat or try them
- Let them help prepare vegetables. Even if it is to help get it out of the fridge or wash it
- Set an example by eating vegetables yourself
- Take your child to the grocery store or farmers market and let them choose
- Visit a pick-your-own vegetable farm
- Read storybooks about vegetables

Vegetable ideas

- Cut yellow, orange, red or green peppers into small, bite-sized pieces (half to one centimetre in size) or into thin strips
- Cut-up pieces of broccoli (cooked or raw) and serve with a dip or dressing
- Grate raw carrots or zucchini
- Cook baby carrots until just soft. Cool them in the fridge. Slice cooled carrots thinly and serve with hummus
- Plant grape tomatoes in a pot and watch them grow. Then pick, wash and enjoy (for children under four years of age, cut into smaller pieces)
- Try less bitter tasting vegetables like peas, carrots and potatoes
- Cook vegetables in low-sodium chicken, beef or vegetable broth instead of water for added flavour
- Add a sprinkle of nutmeg and cinnamon to cooked squash or sweet potatoes
- Add flavour to any cooked vegetable by adding grated cheese, herbs, spices or low-sodium soy sauce

Adding vegetables to recipes

While adding cut-up, grated or mashed vegetables to recipes will add nutrition, it is still important to serve vegetables on their own. Your child needs to be exposed to

the unique taste and texture of different vegetables.

If vegetables are always mixed in, your child will not have the opportunity to learn how to enjoy vegetables. This includes pre-packaged or pouches of pureed vegetables with added fruit.

Be cautious of online recipes and cookbooks that promote hiding or sneaking in vegetables. This approach is not a substitute for offering vegetables separately and can cause a child to reject the food that is hiding the vegetable or become suspicious of every food you offer.

If Your Child Does Not Like To Eat Meat

For families who eat meat, it may take time to enjoy eating it since the texture of meat might be challenging to chew at first. For vegans and vegetarians who do not eat meat, consider careful meal planning or talk to a registered dietitian.

Tips for parents

- Do not pressure, bribe or beg your child to eat meat
- Offer small meat servings but do not insist that your child eat or try them
- Let them help you prepare the meat. Let them get it out of the fridge or pour a marinade
- Set an example by eating meat yourself
- Include alternatives to meat in your meals

Tips to make meat easier to chew

- Simmer meats or cook in a pressure cooker in low-sodium broths for added flavour and tenderness
- Chop or grind meat into soups or casseroles
- Use ground beef, turkey or chicken to make mini burgers, meatballs or meat loaf
- Serve meat with small amounts of hummus, tzatziki, ranch dressing, salsa, tahini, ketchup, applesauce or peanut sauce

Protein ideas

Eggs, fish and plant-based proteins such as nut butter, beans, lentils, tofu, tempeh and other soy-based meat substitutes have similar nutrients to meat and will help your child get the nutrition they need. In addition to the ideas below, there are many online recipes.

- French toast - Soak sliced bread in mixture of egg with a bit of milk and cinnamon. Cook on stovetop until golden brown or bake in the oven for larger batches. Cut into pieces or strips. Serve with applesauce or yogurt
- Hard-boiled eggs – Cover eggs with water in pot and bring it to a boil. Put the lid on and turn burner off. Wait 15 minutes. Rinse with cold water. Store unpeeled eggs in the fridge for up to one week
- Egg, tuna or salmon salad - Mix chopped hard-boiled egg, canned tuna or canned boneless salmon and a small amount of mayonnaise or plain yogurt. Spread on bread, crackers or pita
- Fish or tofu fingers - Dip pieces of white boneless fish (pollock, tilapia) or extra-firm tofu in milk. Roll in breadcrumbs or panko. Herbs and spices optional. Bake in oven on a baking sheet at 450°F (230°C) for 10 to 12 minutes. Serve with a dip or sauce
- Tofu smoothie - In a blender, blend soft (silken) tofu, milk or fortified, unsweetened soy beverage and fruit
- Tomato lentil sauce - Mash red lentils (cooked or canned). Add to tomato sauce and serve on noodles, cooked vegetables or as a dip with whole grain crackers
- Edamame - Sprinkle grated tempeh or parmesan cheese on boiled edamame. Your child may enjoy squeezing the beans out of the bean pod
- Almond pancakes – Mix in 2 tablespoons of ground almonds into the batter for every pancake. Serve with yogurt or applesauce
- Banana bites - Spread peanut or almond butter on a tortilla. Roll up a banana into the tortilla. Cut the roll into round slices

For more information

Visit www.smdhu.org/ChildHealthyEating

Contact **Health811**, 24 hours, 7 days/week to speak to a registered nurse or registered dietitian, at no cost. Call **811** or toll free **1-866-797-0000** or live chat at ontario.ca/health811