



CHILD CARE OPTIONS
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ARTICLES & ACTIVITIES

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The Feeding Relationship

What does the term a “good eater” mean to you? Many people use this to describe a child who eats everything served. Research shows, however, that children who are allowed to decide when they have had enough to eat grow up with less chance of having weight or eating problems later in life.

Ellyn Satter, a registered dietitian and family therapist, describes the “Golden Rule” for feeding children. You, the parent or caregiver, are responsible for what food is served and when it is served. The child is responsible for what to eat, and how much to eat. In other words, it is up to you to prepare and serve a variety of healthy foods at regularly scheduled meal and snack times. It is not up to you to get your child to try new foods or eat everything on the plate. Children who are forced to eat a new food are usually more unwilling to eat it or other new foods in the future. Letting children decide when they have had enough to eat allows them to listen to their own bodies’ cues to tell them when they are full.

Using the “Golden Rule” can help you develop healthy eating habits in your children. Look for the following signs of a “good” eater:

- We enjoy eating food both at the dinner table and in public
- We are willing to try different foods by sampling new ones from time to time
- We enjoy eating a variety of foods from all the 4 food groups
- We are able to enjoy “other” foods like chocolate, candies, potato chips and other low-nutrient foods in moderation, and without guilt or shame!
- We are aware of our hunger and feelings of satisfaction and are able to eat or stop eating based on those feelings

Remembering the following may be helpful as well:

- Young children have small appetites. Be sure to serve child-sized portions (measured in tablespoons, not cups).
- Children's appetites vary, from day to day and week to week. It is normal for children to eat very little one day, and appear to have a "bottomless pit" the next.
- Limit nibbling before meals. Snacks, milk, juice and other sweet drinks consumed within 1-2 hours before a meal can easily "fill children up" and mean they have no room for the meal. If they absolutely cannot wait due to hunger, try a few veggies. These usually won't ruin an appetite.
- Don't short order cook. If your child doesn't want what is on the menu, that's ok. Do suggest your child sit at the table with you to discuss the day's happenings. Snack time isn't that far away, and if your child feels hungry for a while, that is a natural consequence of not eating.

Recommended Reading:

- Raising Happy, Healthy, Weight-wise Kids, by Judy Toews and Nicole Parton.
- Secrets of Feeding a Healthy Family by Ellyn Satter.

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