

Health Room Corner

6 Common Food Mistakes

Fussiness about food is a normal part of a child's development. While many parents feel like it is their job to just make their children eat something, it is really their job to serve a variety of healthy foods and get their children exposed to foods.

Harriet Worobey, a childhood nutrition instructor suggests that a series of simple meal-time strategies can help even the pickiest eater learn to like a more varied diet. The six common mistakes parents make when feeding their children include:

Sending children out of the kitchen

Studies suggest that involving children in meal preparation is an important step in getting them to try new foods. When children are involved in meal preparation, they will at least try food according to Isobel Contento, professor of nutrition at Teacher's College.

Pressuring them to take a bite

Demanding that a child eat at least one bite seems reasonable, but it's likely to backfire. Studies show that children react negatively when parents pressure them to eat foods, even if the pressure offers a reward. The better approach is to put the food on the table and encourage a child to try it. But don't complain if she refuses and don't offer praise if she tastes it. Just ask her if she wants more or take seconds yourself, but try to stay neutral.

Keeping 'Good Stuff' out of reach

Parents worry that children will binge on treats, so often they put them out of sight or on a high shelf. But a large body of research shows that if a parent restricts foods, children just want more. The recommendation for parents is to avoid bringing foods that you feel the need to restrict into the house. Instead, buy healthful snacks and give children free access to the food cabinets.

Dieting in front of your children

Kids are tuned into their parent's eating preferences and are more likely to try foods if they see their mother or father eating them. A Rutgers University study of parent and child food preferences found that preschoolers tended to like or reject the same fruits and vegetables their parents liked or didn't like. Girls are more likely to be picky eaters if their mother's don't like vegetables. Another study found that mother's who were preoccupied with their weight and eating were more likely to restrict foods for their daughters or encourage them to lose weight. By exposing young children to erratic dieting habits, parents may be putting them at risk for eating disorders or a lifetime of chronic dieting.

Serving Boring Vegetables

Nutritionist say parents shouldn't be afraid to dress up vegetables. Adding a little butter, ranch dressing, cheese sauce or brown sugar to a vegetable dish can significantly improve the kid appeal. And adding a little fat to vegetables helps unlock their fat-soluble nutrients. The few extra calories you're adding are a worthwhile tradeoff for the nutritional boost and the chance to introduce a child to a vegetable.

Giving up too soon

Children's eating preferences often change. Parents should keep preparing a variety of healthful foods and putting them on the table, even if a child refuses to take a bite. In young children, it may take 10 or more attempts over several months to introduce a food.

Summary-Article by Tara Parker-Pope

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For additional information check out healthy concoctions that young people will eat; Rachael Ray on cooking with kids. Nytimes.com/wellchild