

# Helping kids to become great eaters

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## Key points:

- Parents and carers are responsible for WHAT to feed and WHEN to feed.
- Toddlers and young children decide HOW MUCH or WHETHER they eat at all.
- Make eating times pleasant and be a good role model.
- Over time children will learn to eat family foods.
- You cannot always please every eater with every food at every meal.

## Helping kids to become great eaters

Do you find mealtimes with children a constant battle?

We have put together some great tips from Ellyn Satter's Division of Responsibility to help children become great eaters and reduce stress for everyone at meal times. According to Ellyn, parents and carers are responsible for WHAT to feed and WHEN to feed. Toddlers and young children have an inborn ability to determine whether they are hungry and so they should decide HOW MUCH or WHETHER they eat at all.

## The role of parents/carers at meal/snack times

- Choose and prepare the food – serve food that you enjoy planning, preparing and eating.
- Provide regular meals and snacks
- If your child refuses to eat what is on offer, then they can wait until the next snack or mealtime.
- Avoid offering food or drinks (except for water) between meal and snack times
- Make eating times pleasant
- Avoid pressure – both positive (praising, reminding, bribing and rewarding) and negative (restricting amounts or types of food, coaxing, punishing, criticising, begging, withholding dessert) at meal times.
- Be a good role model – eat with your child, don't just feed them. Your child looks to you for eating cues. They need to see you eating and enjoying a wide variety of foods and demonstrating good table manners.

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- Make eating times pleasant and be a good role model.
- Over time children will learn to eat family foods.

## The role of the child at meal/snack times

- Children are responsible for whether they will eat and how much.
- Over time children will learn to eat family foods.
- With good role-modelling children will eventually learn acceptable behaviour at meal times including table manners.

## Tips to manage fussy eating

It is natural for young children to be fussy with food as they learn to become more independent eaters. As parents/carers the thought of providing a meal that everyone will eat can be overwhelming. Keep meal times simple by following our tried and true tips:

- Accept that you cannot always please every eater with every food at every meal. Provide each eater with at least one or two foods they generally enjoy at each meal.
- Don't limit the menu to foods that are readily accepted. Keep offering different foods alongside familiar foods.
- Pairing new foods with familiar foods can increase a child's acceptance of new foods. Remember that it can take up to 15 -20 times for children to learn to accept a new food. If they don't want to eat it then that is OK, maybe they will try it next time.
- include a variety of different foods at each meal e.g. meat or alternatives such as legumes; grain foods such as bread, rice or pasta; fruit; vegetables; and dairy such as milk, cheese or yogurt.
- Avoid the temptation to persuade, entice, encourage, or cheer-lead them to eat anything they don't want to eat.
- Don't insist children finish their food. Allow them to eat according to hunger and appetite.
- Avoid becoming a short-order cook or allowing substitutes on the table. Children who aren't excited by today's meal will get lucky some other time.

For more information on the family meal times and the Division of Responsibility go to:  
[www.ellynsatterinstitute.com](http://www.ellynsatterinstitute.com).

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