

Your Child's Healthy Relationship with Food

“It’s our job as parents to provide a variety of healthy foods, give our kids a chance to choose, and help them build a healthy relationship with food. Always be respectful, allowing children to take a ‘no thank you’ bite.”

Michelle Harris

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Hate tomatoes? Have a lifelong aversion to squash? Young children rely on a healthy diet to give them the energy and nutrients that fuel brain development, movement, play and learning. Introducing children to a variety of foods, especially fruits and vegetables, is essential in the early years. Be sure to offer them everything – even if it’s not your favorite, it could be theirs!

Encourage kids to try new things. Offer foods of different colors and textures, and served in different forms. Steamed broccoli but not raw, fresh apple but not baked apple – they’ll let you know their preference. Offer nutritious foods at meal and snack times and give them a chance to choose. Serve reasonable amounts that they can finish. Nutrition expert Michelle Harris says keep trying because “it can take up to 15 tries before a child decides she or he really likes something.”

A mealtime routine that involves children boosts the likelihood of their enjoying the food served and that they will behave well at the table. Sticking close to a mealtime schedule helps you plan and gives children as young as 3-4 years a role in meal prep. Little guys get a kick out of washing fruits and vegetables. With your helping hand, they can safely measure and stir. Next step, they can help set the table.

Strengthen your family by coming together at mealtime. Make a discussion tradition part of your routine. You might ask “What was the best part of your day?” or “What are you thankful for?” Invite children to talk. It gives you a chance to listen and learn from them.

“When we don’t focus on what we are eating, we tend to overeat,” says Michelle. Eliminate mealtime distractions (TV, cell phone) and keep the focus on good food and conversation.

Your child’s healthy relationship with food starts with a healthy diet. Toss in some positive family time and you have a recipe for a nutritionally and emotionally balanced child ... who may just like eggplant!

Preschooler Mealtime Tips From Triple P (Positive Parenting Program)

- Set up a daily mealtime routine of 3 meals + AM and PM snack
- Keep mealtimes to 20-30 minutes
- Serve a variety of foods
- Don’t insist child eats a food he dislikes
- Be realistic about food amounts

