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Division of Responsibility – Creating a Healthy Eater

Child's Responsibility

Your child **decides how much to eat**. Never force your child to eat more than she wants. It is normal for children's appetites to vary from day to day.

Your child **decides whether or not to eat**. Do not beg, threaten, play games, bribe or force your child to eat.

If your child decides not to eat, he can wait until the next scheduled meal or snack.

Children have built-in cues for hunger and feeling full. Your child will **grow the way nature intended**. Children learn to listen to their bodies and eat when their bodies tell them to.

Parent's Responsibility

Choose healthy foods – It's the parent's responsibility to choose which foods to serve, not the child's. Your family will eat better if you buy (or grow) healthy foods. Planning helps ensure you will serve healthy foods.

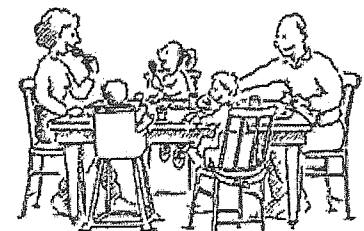
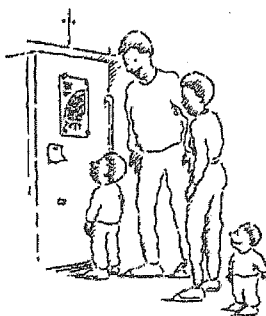
Have meals and snacks at regular times – Children need 3 meals and 2 to 3 healthy snacks a day. Spacing them at least 2 hours apart allows time to get hungry for the next meal or snack. Include older children in meal planning and preparation; and guide them to choose healthy meals away from the home.

Keep mealtimes calm - Make mealtimes a pleasant part of the day. Turn off the TV, eat at the table, and enjoy family time. Talk and smile, but don't distract young children. Focus on your meal and allow your child to enjoy his. Keep the conversation away from food and the amount your child is eating.

Let children eat as much as they want or all or none at all. Offer younger children small servings and allow them to ask for seconds or more. Teach children to listen to hunger and fullness cues.

Children learn by example. If parents eat a variety of healthy foods then eventually the children will too!

Eat together as a family – Be a role model! Eating is a social activity and children are influenced to try new foods when they watch others enjoying good food.



Some Frequently Asked Questions:

1. My child is a picky eater, what should I do?

- Resist the temptation to coax, bribe or instruct children to eat, as that makes children less willing to eat, or to try new foods.
- Do not cater; make the same foods for the whole family and try to always serve a new food with a familiar one.
- It can take **10-15** tries of the same food before a child accepts it.
- Too much juice, milk or other sweet drinks can result in picky eating behaviors.
- Offer snacks at least two hours before meals, then your child will be hungry for meals. This will also help deal with the picky eating behaviors.
- Remember to be patient and set a good example. Eat a variety of foods with your children.

2. My child doesn't like vegetables, should I be concerned?

- Fruits and vegetables contain lots of good vitamins and minerals.
- Let children select vegetables or fruit at the grocery store or grow them in the garden, involve them in making meals and create an excitement of trying all kinds of vegetables.
- Try new and creative ways to serve fruits and vegetables, and remember to be patient and continue offering them.

Don't let meals be a power struggle –

Children may refuse to eat in order to get attention. Give them plenty of attention between meals. Young children need to touch their food and eat with their fingers. Parents need to teach acceptable table manners *and* tolerate some messiness. Ask children to keep you company at the table if they don't feel like eating.

3. Should my child get dessert if he doesn't finish his dinner?

- Dessert should not be used as a reward; instead it can be an important part of a healthy meal.
- Choose nutritious desserts like: fresh fruit, yogurt, rice pudding, or an oatmeal cookie, and limit to 1 serving only.
- It's okay if he decides to eat dessert first and then move on to eating dinner.

4. What if my child is gaining too much weight?

- Offer healthy foods most of the time, and don't restrict or regulate food intake.
- Encourage lots of active play (set a good example yourself).
- Show your child that they are very important, valuable and special people - no strings attached. Children with a healthy self esteem are better able to make good choices.
- Happy, healthy adults come in all shapes and sizes, as do healthy happy children!

If you have questions about your child's nutrition, please contact a Public Health Nurse at your local health unit, or call Dietitian Services at HealthLink BC (formerly Dial-A-Dietitian) at 8-1-1 and ask to speak to a Registered Dietitian.

Abbotsford 604-864-3400	Agassiz 604-793-7160	Burnaby 604-918-7605	Chilliwack 604-702-4900	Cloverdale, Surrey 604-575-5100	Guildford, Surrey 604-587-4750
Hope 604-860-7630	Langley 604-539-2900	Maple Ridge 604-476-7000	Mission 604-814-5500	New Westminster 604-777-6740	Newport, Port Moody 604-949-7200
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