

NUTRITION

Dear Parents:

We have decided that as soon as we have figured out a pattern or habit in a child they change! What is predictable about children is that they are not predictable. Have you ever just thrown up your hands when your child only wants applesauce every meal or when they have a fit if food is touching on their plate? This is very normal behavior for children.

Growing children like to feel independent. What they put in their mouths is what they control. Even with the best intentions, we cannot make a child eat the food we prepare. So, what can you do?

First, be flexible! Avoid power struggles with children. Do not bribe or threaten children with food. Saying things like "If you eat all of your food you can have dessert" may seem like a solution but it is not. Children need to learn when they feel full and by making dessert seem so special the children naturally think it is great stuff.

Parental modeling and attitudes play a tremendous role in shaping a child's beliefs and behaviors. Parents are a child's first and greatest teachers, and this role is most significant during preschool years.

During the first years of life children are growing physically, intellectually, and socially at a remarkable rate. Their bodies are growing, their beliefs, attitudes, and tastes are forming. Whether they reach their full potential largely depends on their nutritional well being and on their learning experiences from earliest childhood. What children eat and how they view food for the remainder of their lives will depend on their experiences during childhood.

Try to introduce a new food a few days before you serve it. It is better if you serve only a small amount at first and let your child request more. Let your child be involved in all aspects of cooking, if possible. Then if your child does not like the food, try again. Some foods require that a person become accustomed to them. Also, remember that children's taste buds are super sensitive and children, like adults, have a right not to like some foods. Food jags or periods of only wanting one food is normal and it is OK to let the child experience it. Children need food often. Three meals and three snacks a day are normal. Try non-traditional foods for breakfast like pizza and burritos. Keep fresh fruits, vegetables, cheese, peanut butter, crackers and milk handy for snacks. Also, it is a good idea to explain to children why food is important and how it helps their bodies grow and to be healthy.

Then enjoy!