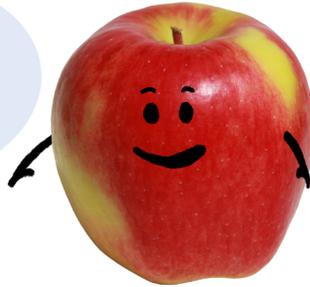


# Positive Mealtimes

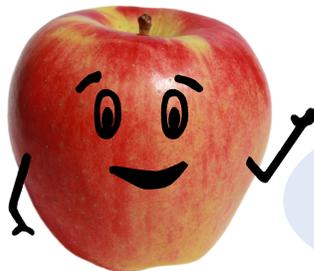
Promote happy, healthy eating with children

Young children are learning how to eat and what they like —and they need adult help.



It is normal for children to...	It is common for adults to...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• be picky eaters.</li><li>• easily eat one thing one day and refuse it the next.</li><li>• be unsure about trying certain foods.</li><li>• be messy eaters.</li><li>• dislike many vegetables.</li><li>• at times eat a lot, other times, not very much.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• encourage children to finish all their food.</li><li>• remind children they liked a food yesterday.</li><li>• pressure children to try a new food.</li><li>• force children to be less messy.</li><li>• praise children for eating their vegetables.</li><li>• insist children eat more or eat less.</li></ul>

What you say does matter.

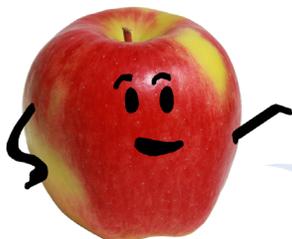


Find out how you can help. It might be different than you think...

## When you eat with children, do you try to get them to eat...

- a certain amount of food? (e.g. "You need to eat at least three bites of broccoli.")
- in a certain order? (e.g. "Eat your vegetables before you get dessert.")
- certain types of food? (e.g. "You've only eaten rice and carrots, you need to eat some chicken.")

If yes, this is pressure for you and your child.



Take the pressure off—and support healthy eating in the long run.

What children want	How adults can help
Children want routine, sit-down meals and snacks.	Offer 3 meals and 2-3 snacks daily with water in between. This structure allows children to develop trust that they have regular opportunities to satisfy hunger.
Children want a pleasant mealtime.	Focus table talk on an event from their day instead of focusing on how much food a child is or isn't eating.
Children want to eat like you do.	Teach by example. Model good eating habits. In time, even months or years, children will learn to eat the foods their parents like.
Children want to feel independent.	Help children get served or let them serve themselves, then remain neutral. Avoid reminding, insisting, encouraging, suggesting, or praising children's food choices.
Children want to eat well.	Let children eat or not eat what is offered. Help them succeed by offering a food at each meal that they are comfortable with, such as milk, bread or rice. This gives them confidence that there will be something to satisfy their hunger as they're learning to enjoy new foods.

# What you **SAY** matters.

✓	Does a child say...?	Consider saying...
	<p>“Why do I have to come to the table?” (The child is too busy with an activity to come to the table.)</p>	<p>“I see you are busy with _____. In two minutes we are all going to the table to have dinner/lunch together.”</p>
	<p>“I’m not hungry.” (It is right before a snack or meal begins.)</p>	<p>“You don’t have to eat, but start the meal by sitting with us.”</p>
	<p>“Yuck, I don’t like it.” Or “I won’t eat it.”</p>	<p>“If you don’t like it, just say ‘No, thanks’. There are other foods on the table. You can eat some of those if you want.”</p>
	<p>“I want to eat peanut butter on my bread for dinner instead!”</p>	<p>“We’re not having that today. You don’t have to eat anything if you don’t want to. Come to the table and see what we are having.”</p>
	<p>“I want more pasta.” (The child hasn’t touched their vegetables or chicken.)</p>	<p>“OK.” (Allow your child to eat as much or as little as they like of each food.)</p>
	<p>“I only want dessert today.” (There is dessert planned with dinner.)</p>	<p>“OK.” (Unlike other foods at meals, no seconds on dessert.)</p>
	<p>The child doesn’t say anything but is messy and disruptive with their food on purpose.</p>	<p>“That’s not what we do with food. If you don’t want to eat, I can take your plate away.”</p>
	<p>“I’m done.” (Other people are still eating.)</p>	<p>“OK.” (Allow children to leave when they say they have had enough to eat. Young children can play quietly in the same room. As children get older, they will stay longer at the table.)</p>
	<p>“I’m not hungry.” (It is at the end of the snack or meal and your child hasn’t eaten anything.)</p>	<p>“OK. This is your last chance to eat before our next meal/snack.”</p>
	<p>“I’m hungry.” (It is before or after a meal or snack.)</p>	<p>“We’re not eating right now. Do you want some water or do you want to wait until _____ (snacktime, breakfast, lunch, dinner)?”</p>

# Take ACTION!

Pick one of the situations you want to focus on and make a plan.

## EXAMPLE

My child says:

I'm hungry. (and it's 15 minutes before we sit down to eat dinner)

I will say:

We're eating dinner in 15 minutes. Do you want some water or do you want to wait until dinner?

## MY PLAN

My child says:

\_\_\_\_\_

I will say:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

It is your job as the parent to...

- choose what foods to serve at each meal.
- decide when meals and snacks are served.
- decide where each meal and snack is served.

Creating new habits and routines can be difficult at first. In time, providing scheduled sit-down meals and snacks (3 meals and 2-3 snacks each day with water in between) and avoiding pressure will support more positive mealtimes and a healthy relationship with food.



For more help with feeding children and picky eating, visit [EllynSatterInstitute.org](http://EllynSatterInstitute.org).  
If you have more nutrition questions, call HealthLink BC at 8-1-1 and ask to speak to a dietitian.