

Peas and Harmony: How To Raise A Healthy Eater

The starting point for the journey: Look in the mirror!

How do *I* feel about food and eating?

What are the issues and baggage that I “bring to the table” for my children?

What are my goals for my children when it comes to food and healthy eating?

What does a healthy eater look like?

A healthy eater **enjoys food** and **feels good about eating**.

Healthy eaters are **interested** in food.

Healthy eaters **eat a variety of food** over time and are somewhat **flexible** in experimenting with foods.

A healthy eater **knows how much to eat** by tuning in to the cues from his or her body.

Healthy eaters **learn how to trust their bodies** to tell them when they're hungry and when they have had enough to eat.

The radical statement:

Your child's eating **attitudes and behaviours** are more important than **what** he or she actually eats on any given day!!

The Strategy:

The Division of Responsibility

Parents are responsible for the **what, when and where** of feeding.

Children are responsible for **how much and whether** they eat.

Ellyn Satter

Your jobs:

- To be the **“gatekeeper”** and control which foods you bring into your house.
- To provide **structure** - a regular schedule of meals and sit-down snacks.
- To make meal times **pleasant** for your children.
- To be a **role model** - show your child what he or she needs to learn about food and behaviour at meals and snack times.
- To not let your child graze for food or drinks (except water) between meals and snack times.

If you do your jobs with **feeding**, your child will do their job with **eating!** You have to **trust your child** to decide **whether** and **how much** to eat of what you have provided.

What NOT to worry about:

The details of each meal

- take a long term, **“big picture”** approach
- focus more on the **how** of eating than the **what**

Food “Jags”

- they will pass if you ride them out **calmly**
- don’t get emotional! -keep offering a **variety** of foods

“I’m not hungry”

- “that’s ok, just sit with us while we eat” -no pressure!
- stick to your **structure** of meals and snacks

“My child didn’t eat enough”

- only your child knows what amount is enough for him or her! Avoid grazing between meals & snacks.
- research confirms that **when food is forced on people, they eat less**

“My child ate too much”

- see above
- given free access to food, children will self-regulate, as long as they don’t feel that food is scarce
- research shows that **when food is restricted, people eat more**

Common Pitfalls To Avoid

Catering/short-order cooking for your kids

Jumping up to prepare an alternative meal tells your child “I don't expect you to learn to eat this food I've provided.” Be sure there's always something on the table that your child will comfortably eat, but keep working to expand your family's repertoire by offering new foods as well.

Feeding on demand

This can lead to poor behavior at mealtime. Kids need to recognize and tune in to their body's cues of hunger and fullness. Stick to a predictable schedule of meals and sit-down snacks.

Over-praising healthy eating

Over-praising kids for eating certain foods can backfire. They may start to become suspect about the healthy foods and why they get so much attention.

“Pushing” vegetables or other healthy foods

*The goal should not be to “get” kids to **eat** vegetables; it should be to help them learn to **enjoy** them. Instead of pushing the veggies, focus on making them the **norm: make them appealing and available to kids.** “There's a rainbow on my plate!”*

Making kids eat their veggies before they get dessert

Research shows that this feeding strategy not only decreases kids' preferences for the food they are made to eat (usually healthy foods) but it increases the appeal of the “reward” food (ie. dessert.)

Making kids clean their plates

This teaches kids to eat for external reasons, and to disregard their body's cues for hunger and fullness.

What you SHOULD do to positively influence your child's eating behavior:

- **RELAX!!** ☺
- Stick to the **strategy**. You do your job with feeding; let your child do their job with eating.
- Establish and follow a predictable **structure** for meals and sit-down snacks.
- Serve meals **family style**. Help your child learn to eat the amount that's right for him or her.
- Be **realistic** about the world your child is growing up in! **Forbidden foods** become powerful. Have a **plan** for dealing with the junk – whatever you're comfortable with. ****Try serving dessert along with the main course****
- **Eat WHAT and HOW** you want your child to eat. Lead by example.
- Think about the foods you want your family to eat most often and serve them regularly. Make those foods **available and appealing**.
- Help your child connect with food by: **shopping, picking, growing, cooking**.
- Be **consistent**.
- Offer **choices** (peas or carrots?) but don't be open-ended.

Where to start? A simple and powerful tool: **The Family Meal**

"Research has shown that family meals have a greater impact on raising healthy, happy children than income, family structure, or extra-curricular activities!"

Begin by focusing on the **how**; not the what.

Start where you're at. Eat what you are eating now; just sit down and eat it **together** when that's possible. Don't stress about cooking a gourmet feast.

Plan, and the rest will follow.

Make **structure** the priority. Don't obsess about the details of the meal.

Work within your real life schedule and plan for a few family meals each week. If Sunday breakfast is easiest for you, just start with that.

"The healthiest ingredient in a family meal is laughter."

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