

# How to Build Healthy Eaters

Niagara Health System

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**Feeding** is one of a parent's more important jobs and biggest challenges. It is how we help our children grow healthy and strong. But mealtime is about much more than food. Healthy eating for children includes eating a variety of healthy foods, positive eating behaviors, and support from parents and caregivers.

Many parents are concerned whether their child's eating behaviors are "normal". It is important to remember that most young children are picky about food. Their appetites vary from meal to meal and they may only eat one or two foods from what is offered at mealtime. Their likes and dislikes will change often and they rarely eat a new food the first time they see it. Some children try new foods easily, others won't.

Here you will find suggestions to help your child build lifelong healthy eating habits.



## The Division of Responsibility

When it comes to eating, view both you and your child as having your own jobs. This is called "**The Division of Responsibility.**"

### **As a parent, your job is to decide:**

- What healthy foods are served
- When meals and snacks are served
- Where food is served

### **Your child's job is to decide:**

- Which of the healthy foods to eat from those served
- How much to eat

When you approach feeding in this way your child learns to listen to his/her own hunger signals and it also leads to fewer power struggles between parent and child around food.

# Tips for Mealtime Success

## **Establish routine meal and snack times**

Meal and snack routines will help children know when to expect food and come to the table hungry and interested in eating. Provide a healthy meal or snack every 2-3 hours. Avoid letting your child graze throughout the day and only offer water between scheduled meals and snacks.

## **Eat as a family whenever possible**

Remember that mealtime is about more than just food, it is a time to connect with your child and support their overall development. Use family meals to act as a role model and let your child see you eat healthy foods.

## **Seat your child at the table to eat**

Turn off the TV or other distractions as it takes away from talking as a family. The television can also distract children from eating and can result in overeating.

## **Offer small portions of food**

Children have small stomachs. Serving large portions of food can overwhelm children and may make them less likely to eat. Use child size plates and offer your child less food than you think they will eat. Allow your child to ask for more if they are still hungry.

## **Let your child serve and feed him/herself**

Offer healthy foods from three or four food groups at each meal and let your child decide or to tell you how much to put on their plate. Give your child independence and let them pick which foods they want to eat from the healthy foods offered.

## **Do not force your child to eat**

Forcing often results in children refusing food and eating less, takes the fun out of mealtimes, and also teaches children to rely on others to tell them how much to eat and what they are feeling. This may result in the loss of their own hunger and fullness cues. Remember, children recognize when they are hungry and when they are full – probably much better than adults do. If you do not make a big fuss about whether or not they are eating, mealtime likely will not turn into a battlefield. Let your child decide how much to eat by allowing your child to say “no thank you” or “more please”.

## **Be patient with new foods**

Patience is key. You may have to offer your child a new food 10-15 times before he/she decides to try it. Avoid prompting, pressuring, nagging, or game playing to get your child to eat a new food. Instead, offer it over and over again in a casual way and allow your child to touch the new food, smell, lick, and taste it. Children learn by watching and copying you. Be a role model for your child and allow him to see you eating healthy foods.

## **Let your child leave the table when they are full**

If they are finished eating, you may let them leave the table. Children who are full will lose interest in food and stop eating. Keeping your child at the table will not make them eat more. Expect some food to be left on your child's plate.

### **References:**

Adapted from the work of Ellyn Satter

<http://ellynsatterinstitute.org/>



## Green Meatballs

Adapted from: Eat Right Ontario

**Preparation Time:** 15 minutes

**Cook Time:** 30 minutes

**Makes:** 30 meatballs

### Ingredients:

- 3 cups Chopped fresh broccoli florets
- 8oz extra lean ground beef, chicken, or pork
- 1 Tbsp finely chopped fresh ginger
- 1 Tbsp rice wine vinegar
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- Salt and pepper to taste

### Nutritional Information

1 serving: 6 meatball

Calories: 90, Protein 10g, Fat: 4g, Carbohydrate: 4g, Fibre: 2g, Sodium: 284mg

## Directions

1. In a saucepan of boiling water, cook broccoli for about 8 minutes or until very tender
2. Drain well and using a potato masher, mash broccoli until fairly smooth to make about 1 cup (250mL); let cool slightly
3. In a large bowl, combine beef, ginger, rice wine, garlic, salt and pepper and broccoli
4. Using hand, mix together until broccoli is evenly distributed
5. Using about 1 Tbsp of the mixture roll into balls and place on parchment paper or foil lined baking sheet to make about 30 meatballs
6. Bake in 180C (375F) oven for about 20 minutes or until no longer pink inside and golden brown
7. For a complete meal serve with whole grain pasta, additional cooked vegetable, and low sodium tomato sauce