

Oregon's Children



Letters for parents of infants and toddlers: Letter 4

Oregon's Children

Babies grow up to be strong healthy children despite many different feeding customs. In America, each generation develops what is considered the "right" way of feeding babies. Whatever practices you choose, here's a few basic principles:

- Food must provide enough, but not too much, water, calories, and nutrients such as protein, vitamins, and minerals.
- Calories should come from a balance of carbohydrate, protein, and fat.
- Foods and the way they are fed should lead to lifelong good eating habits.
- Foods should be easily digested so the nutrients can be used by the body.

Recommendations for feeding infants are based on facts and opinions. Recommendations are changed as new information is found.

It's Recommended

Breast feed babies if possible. They get protection against some infections and disease from breast milk. It's designed to meet special nutritional needs of babies. They can breast feed up to 2 years.

When baby is bottle fed: mix the formula according to directions. Too little water is as harmful as too much water.

Always hold babies while feeding them.

Use only formula in baby's bottle. Babies who are ready for other liquids will want to drink from a cup. Go slowly in changing from nursing to using a cup.

Use only breast milk or formula until baby is approximately 5 or 6 months old. Some doctors believe that feeding other foods too early leads to allergies and/or overweight.

Add an iron-fortified baby cereal as the first solid food to baby's diet at 5 or 6 months. Continue until baby is 18 months old. Add

pureed vegetables, fruits, and meats (one at a time) at 7 or 8 months. Feed any new food 4 or 5 days in a row to note whether your baby is allergic to it.

Introduce chopped or soft foods before a baby's first birthday. They do not learn to chew and often resist textured foods if left on pureed foods too long.

Feed babies often. Small stomachs hold only enough food for a short time and then need to eat again.

It's Not Recommended

Avoid encouraging children to eat more than they want. It teaches them to ignore the body signals of fullness. It may lead to a lifetime of overeating and obesity.

Do not make a habit of putting baby to bed with a bottle. Food in the mouth of a toddler all night contributes to tooth decay known as "bottle mouth" caries.

Refrain from feeding infants honey because of the danger of infant botulism that makes babies very sick. Use corn syrup in the formula until after the first year.

Do not use raw milk. Call your county Extension office for directions on how to pasteurize milk at home.

Do not use 2 percent milk before 1 year of age or skim milk before 2 years of age. Fat in milk supplies energy for growth.

Pop or "jello" water is not a substitute for milk. If they're used to treat diarrhea, use only until diarrhea stops.

About Toddlers

Most toddler feeding problems are caused by unreal expectations, imitating undesirable adult behavior, or lack of mealtime rules regularly enforced.

Examples of unrealistic expectations are wanting toddlers to:

- eat more than their stomachs can hold or the same amount of food each day
- go 4 or 5 hours between meals
- not spill food

Many feeding problems begin when toddlers are 12 to 15 months old. Parents notice they are not eating as much as before. This reduction is normal because baby's growth begins to slow. Babies triple their weight by the end of the first year. To prevent this tremendous growth from continuing, baby's appetite decreases. Problems arise when parents don't accept the decrease in appetite and try to enforce the "clean plate" rule.

Examples of toddlers imitating undesirable behaviors are:

- drinking pop instead of water
- refusing to taste new foods
- skipping breakfast and then wanting sweets mid-morning
- asking for less-nutritious foods seen on TV
- expecting sweets for being good

Help toddlers choose a balanced diet by your example. When parent's eating habits are undesirable, toddlers cannot be expected to learn good food habits. Also TV advertisements for snacks and sweets help shape the way toddlers choose food.

Simplify and enforce a few rules about eating and food. Don't be afraid to set rules and stick to them. Toddlers will test you but everyone is happier living with limitations.

Examples of mealtime rules are:

- wash your hands before eating
- sit at the table or a special place for meals and snacks
- taste a little of any new food served
- when toddlers refuse meals, the next food comes at snack time. Small pieces of raw vegetable, fruit, cheese and crackers, or fruit juice provide needed nutrients; cookies or candy interferes with their appetite for the next meal.
- make mealtime pleasant

Calmly enforce your rules without threatening or shouting. Battles begin if parents force and toddlers resist. Conflicts can become more important than eating. If toddler won't eat within a reasonable time, remove the plate. Sticking to your rule of no between-meal "goodies" is easier each time you enforce it. No child ever starved to death in 2 or 3 hours.

Behavioral scientists agree that many behaviors are influenced by parent-child interactions over eating. Toddlers who get pop instead of milk if they cry loud enough learn behavior that works in many situations. By getting pop, toddlers are rewarded for crying. The behavior will likely be repeated.

Toddlers usually don't get into trouble from not eating enough as long as an adequate supply of the right food is presented to them. They won't eat everything all the time, but their diet balances over the weeks.

Toddlers who carry a bottle and drink whenever they want may resist sitting at the table to eat. They may become fussy eaters or develop chronic constipation because their diet lacks roughage. Milk is good food but it doesn't meet all their nutritional needs.

Mealtime is more than getting food into children. Family mealtimes are one of the few times when everyone is doing something together. At family meals, children share family experiences, learn social skills, new words, and how to talk with others.



Making It Easy

Establish a regular time for meals and snacks. Stay close to your routine modifying the schedule as children get older.

Breakfast should not be skipped or delayed. The body has been without food from 10 to 12 hours.

Feed babies and toddlers ahead of the family or before they get too tired or hungry.

When toddlers come to the table, there should be a special place for them with a chair of appropriate height and a foot rest. Use child size utensils. Toddlers can help serve or prepare foods too.

Do not give babies foods that may cause choking. Avoid nuts, raw vegetables, popcorn, and hard candy.

Have active children look at a book or play a quiet game before mealtime.

Many children prefer sweets because we teach them to do so. Using sweets as a bribe or punishment teaches that sweets are special and desirable.

Candy, pop, and salty snacks will not kill a child. But if they are eaten instead of foods such as fruits, vegetables, or milk they may replace the vitamins and minerals necessary for good health.



Toddlers may have a spell of wanting one food all the time. Peanut butter sandwiches three times a day aren't harmful. The novelty soon wears off, so don't let the demands become a fight.

It is reasonable for you to decide what your child should eat. It is reasonable for a child to decide how much to eat.

Relax, you are probably doing lots of things right. What you notice most are the things that go wrong!

Food Meanings

Food has physical, emotional, and social meanings to people. The way infants and toddlers are fed will affect how they use food throughout their lives. Food means:

- Freedom from hunger. This is the fundamental reason for eating. Hunger pains are unpleasant.
- Good health. A healthy body requires the nutrients in a balanced diet.
- Pleasure. Children select foods that please them, but they can learn foods that are good for them also taste good.
- Emotional security. There is a deep emotional attachment to food. Pleasant or unpleasant experiences are often associated with certain foods.
- Communication. Most social occasions involve food in some way. Eating creates an atmosphere for talking. What words best describe mealtime at your home: lively, happy, aggressive, sullen, generous, scolding, relaxed, tense?

Dear Parent: You have a special job in making sure your baby has the best possible food for growth and health. In addition to knowing what to feed, there is the task of teaching baby to choose good foods. Food habits are developed early in life. Many things baby needs can wait but now is the time for getting and staying on the right track for building a strong body and mind.

Sincerely yours,

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