



Roberta Bantel

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FEEDING LITTLE FOLKS



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To Parents of Young Children...

Your child is growing out of babyhood in mind and body. Let him do this naturally, let him grow and learn at his own pace.

He is becoming a more independent person each year. It is part of growth. This independence shows up in appetite, in sudden likes and dislikes for food, in changes in activity, play, rest, and attitudes toward people.

He will do best if you will let him progress at the speed which is natural for him. Your part is to give him the chance to develop in a happy home, where he finds healthful food, activity, peaceful rest, cleanliness, companionship, love, and discipline which he can understand.

Height and weight charts often alarm parents. They fret if their child seems out of step with the chart. What is important is that your child grows—not that he reaches or exceeds an average.

Some time during the early years the child will slow up in growth for a while. This may occur before or after he is three. During this time his appetite usually lags. He may be less active. Parents should not be alarmed.

Your child's physician is his friend and yours. Even if your child is healthy, regular visits to his physician, usually every six months until he is six, will help your child reach his best development and prevent as much illness as possible by detecting any danger signals early.

Your child's development depends much upon his food. Many things, of course, enter into his growth, but he needs the foods that build a sturdy body in which his mind can develop.

This booklet tells you of your one- to five-year-old child and his food. In it we have tried to help parents foresee some pitfalls which they may escape by understanding some of the ways of little folks with their food. These ways are tied with a child's stage of development, his activity, rest, companionship, and security. It is natural to enjoy eating. Our job as parents and physicians is to let children grow up with this natural enjoyment of food.

E. T. McEnery M.D.



Feeding Little Folks

Feeding little folks can be fun if you know

What to expect in children.

What foods they should have.

How to bring children and foods together *happily*.

Family worries over food grow out of knowing more about foods than about children. We learned what foods were good for growth and health. We measured how much of each food children should have. We expected them to eat that food. In great numbers they didn't. Doctors found their offices filled with parents upset over growing children who didn't eat by the rules.

With so many Johns and Marys fighting food, we realized we needed to know more about children. In recent years many studies have added to our understanding of the development of human personality. We still have much to learn but, if we use what we know now, we can feed our children more successfully.

What To Expect In Children

1. No two children are exactly alike. We should respect and try to understand each child's personality.
2. They all grow through similar stages of development. Each needs to grow in his own time and his own way.
3. Every child needs to do for himself whatever he is able to do. First efforts will be awkward but should be encouraged because they are steps toward health and growth.

1. No two children are exactly alike.

Children differ in body build. Whether your child will be the short stocky type, a tall string bean, or some type in between depends upon his inheritance. Lack of proper food could prevent him from gaining his full stature but stuffing him with food won't change him from one type to another.

Children grow at different rates. Jack gains weight more rapidly than his cousin, Mary, who is the same age. He wants and needs considerably more food than Mary. Forcing food on Mary wouldn't make her grow faster. It would only upset her. Her slower growth rate requires less food.

Each child may go through periods when growth spurts and then slows down. In a "spurt" he eats more food because he needs it. When growth slows down, he eats less.

As children grow in height and weight, they also grow in the things *they can do* and the things *they can learn*. Patsy wants to try using her cup and spoon by herself before she is a year old. Mike, on the other hand, may be several weeks older than Patsy before he makes these first efforts to feed himself.

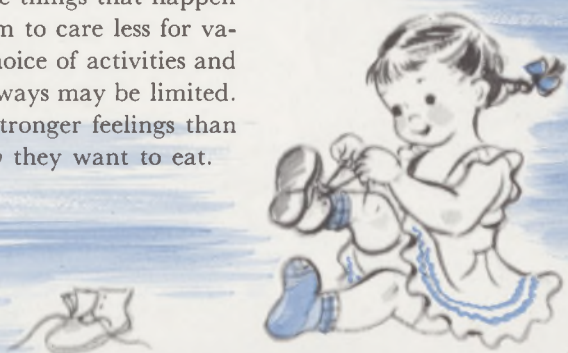
We have no control over the child's rate of growth. We cannot hurry it. We can only help by:

Providing proper food for growth.

Encouraging all of his early messy attempts at feeding himself.

Some children can control their muscles better than others. Some learn to tie their shoe laces easily. Others find it hard to do for a long time. Similarly, one child makes a bigger mess of feeding himself than another. Getting food on a spoon, carrying it right side up and hitting the little mouth is a complex business. Any child will find it difficult at first. Those whose muscle control is not good will find it harder. All need patient parents willing to let them work at it.

Children react differently. We have much to learn about the child's "temperament" or "disposition." But we do know that each child reacts in his own way to the things that happen to him. Some children seem to care less for variety than others. Their choice of activities and friends, as well as foods, always may be limited. Some children will have stronger feelings than others about *what* and *how* they want to eat.



2. All children grow through similar stages of development.

Parents find comfort when they understand that children's disturbing behavior often is a natural part of their development. It still may be difficult to endure. Between one and five you can expect:

Great activity. From a helpless baby, your child changes to a busy little person trying to do things for himself. His muscles must have use before he can learn to direct them. Need for practice keeps him up and doing. Give him many safe opportunities to run, climb, and explore. Then he may be willing to sit still long enough to eat a meal.

If he goes through a period when he'd rather stand than eat, you may as well feed him standing up. This phase will pass. Soon he will eat sitting down because he sees you eat that way.

Some contrariness. Irritating though your young child's "NO" may be, it represents growth and development. He is discovering himself and trying to express likes and dislikes of his own. At this early stage his vocabulary is limited. He can say "NO" or act "NO" easier than tell you what he wants or would like to do. When he closes his mouth against food he is not trying to be annoying.

It is his way of saying he doesn't like it or he has had enough. If you





accept his verdict in a matter of fact way he will not get the idea that refusing food is a way to make life exciting.

As he grows older, he likes to make choices. If he is not fond of vegetables, letting him choose between two may persuade him to eat the one of his choice.

Much imitation. He admires his family and wants to be like those in it. Doing what they do helps him understand their actions and makes him feel grown up. Foods he chooses or refuses are likely to reflect choices and attitudes of someone dear to him. Imitation is one of the most powerful forces in learning. Too much praise for carrots may convey your anxiety to have him eat them. Seeing others eat them without comment works better.

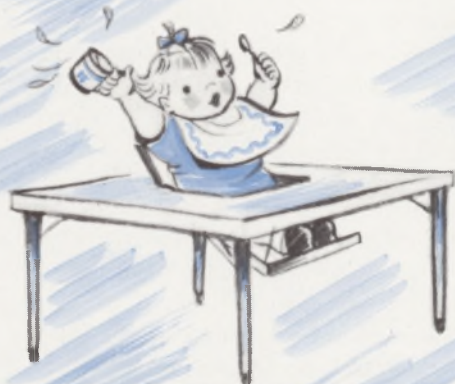
A need for routine. Just as breathing and heart beats are regular, so there is regularity in hunger and digestion. The baby sets up his own feeding schedules if allowed to do so. The pre-school child, too, has his own regular body demands. An orderly pattern of mealtimes, playtime, naptime, bathtime, and bedtime seems essential to his emotional and physical well-being. But no one schedule is perfect for every child. One that suits your family life and your child's needs is best. Many children under three go through a period of insisting on rigid routine. Any change in bedtime, bathtime, or mealtime procedures may upset a child so that he cannot settle down until he starts the performance over from the beginning. In this phase he even may insist that table and chair, china and foods be placed in definite spots. The order seems to fill some emotional need. Satisfying his demands helps him grow through this period successfully. Letting him be set in his way for a while seems to help him be more flexible later.

Some dawdling. When the first keen edge is taken off his hunger, a child may be in no hurry about eating. He has no adult sense of time to push him. Urging speed will only spoil his pleasure in eating. If there is some real reason to hurry him, better help the younger child. Explain to the older one.

Food "jags." A child may want peaches and oatmeal (or some other menu) every night for supper, then suddenly refuse to eat either for a spell. If his menu is not too impractical and you can be casual about it, he is not apt to stay on a "jag" long.

Giving in to these quirks will not spoil the child. Instead, our being reasonable and less demanding with him seems to help him be a more reasonable, less demanding little person himself.

Give him the security of a few rules. A child needs a few simple rules agreed upon by both parents. Too many confuse him. He needs to know what to expect from both parents. We don't insist upon a clean plate before dessert but we do give *small* portions. If he plays with his food, remove it without "threats." Another meal may be eaten without fuss and play. He will remember.



3. Every child needs to do for himself what he is able to do.

When children can do things for themselves they gain confidence in themselves. The time to teach a child to do things is when he shows he wants to learn. If he is pushed too early, failure frightens him. If he is held back when he is ready, it may be hard to interest him in learning later.

Let him feed himself when he wants to try. Wild movements with spoon and cup containing food are not easy for parents to face calmly. But if you insist on feeding him yourself when growth has given him the urge to do it, he may get the idea that the job is yours and let you continue indefinitely.



Some children will be able to feed themselves before they are two. Others won't until they are past three. Don't hurry yours. Just let him take over when he shows he is ready. After three he may want to draw his own glass of water.

Give him opportunities to be helpful. Between three and six years, children enjoy helping in the kitchen. They are thrilled to be able to shell peas, beat eggs, set the table, and pass sandwiches or cookies. To help in a garden and have a tiny plot of his own is real fun. Imagine any child who grows his own carrots not eating them! He likes to go to the food store with you. It's fun to scrub his own potato. The utter joy of a three-year-old washing silverware in lovely sudsy water should not be dimmed. Results will not be perfect, but if you can praise a reasonable copy of your own efforts you will build your child's faith in himself and strengthen the bonds of affection between you.

Like puppies, little children like to smell their food. Some authorities think that the better eaters are children accustomed to the tantalizing aromas in the kitchen of a good cook.

Let him brush his own teeth. After you have shown him how, your two-year-old is apt to find it fun to brush the sixteen tiny teeth he probably owns. Soon he may have twenty to brush. His eagerness to "do" helps him become accustomed to the fresh feeling of teeth brushed after he eats. He is proud of these teeth. The dentist can become his friend now. That first visit should be a happy one. Better to make a second one for any unpleasant work to be done.

Parents who study and accept their child's personality will find common sense a guide in avoiding and overcoming feeding difficulties.





What Foods for Children?

The manner of offering them is as important as the foods

Foods known to supply the essentials for health and growth are:

Milk and Milk Products

Fruits and Vegetables

Eggs, Meat, Poultry, Fish

Bread and Butter, Cereals

Fish liver oil, vitamin D milk, or other source of vitamin D

Each child's daily diet should include foods from each of these groups.* But you need not battle to get your child to eat them. Children like to eat food that tastes good to them. If your child does not like one food from a group, another one from the group will do as well. Today we have practical information from nursery schools on what makes foods attractive to most little folks. The important thing is to have your child enjoy food.

MILK *No other food will do as much for growing children.*

It furnishes proteins to build muscles and body tissues

calcium and phosphorus to build bones and teeth

vitamins to promote growth and health

easily digested fat and sugar for fuel for that activity

3 to 4 cups daily often is recommended, but many pre-school children at slow periods of growth simply can't hold that much. Some under three may drink less than 2 cups a day. Efforts to push milk only make children balky about it. You cannot afford to let your child

*Check with your doctor if some health condition of your child requires a special diet. He also will tell you at what age he thinks different foods should be given to your child. All foods help supply fuel for your child's activity needs *and* each food should also provide other food values, since the young child's capacity is small.



get set against it at this age. You want him to drink it all his life. Offering it in ways he will find attractive and letting him take it or leave it is the best procedure—IF he sees the rest of his family drink it!

Serve it warmed to room temperature to younger children. Few under three like milk cold even though they like ice cream.

Protect its flavor. Children notice a taint quicker than grown-ups. Keep it cold and covered tightly. Be sure it is pasteurized milk.

Children who can pour their own milk from a small pitcher into a small broad-mouthed, flat-bottomed cup often drink more. Pouring makes them feel grown up. A small glass which little hands can hold pleases many children.

Sipping through colored straws is an engaging performance. It may be used to advantage occasionally.

Use whole milk on cereal in place of cream. The richness of cream may slow up digestion and rob the child of appetite.

Cook with milk to get more into the child's diet and to make dishes he likes:

Cook his cereals in milk instead of water.

Milk soups go down more easily if he can drink them.

Milk desserts—tapioca, corn starch, and rice puddings—are all liked if soft and jelly-like in texture. To please little folks, increase the milk in such recipes. Serve smooth custards, soft bread puddings, and junkets.

Ice cream is one way of adding milk to the older child's meals. The younger child, under three, may enjoy a little now and then. Serve your pre-school child plain ice cream which does not contain nuts or rich flavorings.



Cheese of mild flavor is liked by most children. All kinds of cheese are made of milk, but their food values vary slightly.

Cottage cheese is recommended for all children. It gives fine muscle-building protein. It does not replace milk, of course, since some of the vitamin and mineral content is lost in preparation.

Cheddar (American) cheese is a concentrated form of milk, high in protein. A 1 1/4-inch cube has about the same food value as 1 cup of milk.

Give younger children about one-half teaspoon of cheese on a cracker. American cheese can be grated first, though even some one-year-olds like to chew cheese.

Most children are fond of bite-size cubes of cheese they can pick up with their fingers.

Cheese sauce on rice, fish, vegetables, and spaghetti is popular with many children. So are small toasted cheese sandwiches.

Cook cheese gently, at *low* temperature for a *short* time. Otherwise it gets stringy and rubbery.

EGGS

Furnish proteins to build muscles and body tissues
iron to build blood
vitamins to promote growth and health

1 egg a day is desirable.

Serve the best eggs you can afford to children. They are more discriminating than adults in detecting slight differences in flavor.

Keep eggs covered in the refrigerator to prevent their taking up the odors or flavors of other foods.

Serve soft-cooked eggs in a cup to make it easier for the child to manage. A special egg cup or a "hen-covered" dish usually pleases a child.





Cook eggs carefully if you want your child to eat them. As with meat, moisture counts. Eggs scrambled with milk in the top of a double boiler, soft-cooked in the shell, poached, steamed or baked at low heat so that no crust forms on top win preference with the pre-school set. If your child is one who likes hard-cooked eggs to eat in his hand, let him have them that way.



MEAT, POULTRY, FISH

Furnish proteins to build muscles and body tissues
iron and phosphorus to build blood
B-complex vitamins to promote growth and health

One or more child-size servings daily of lean meat, poultry, or fish is important for growing children.

Choose from beef, lamb, pork, liver, chicken, fresh or frozen or canned boneless fish, mild-flavored frankfurters.

Serve ground meat in patties, meat loaf, or in white sauce to the youngest children.

Bite-size pieces of meat—which they may eat with their hands—please most children past two years. Those who can manage a fork easily like to use it to eat small pieces of meat cut for them.

Cook meat at low temperatures to preserve moisture. Children prefer their meats moist in texture, mild in flavor. Meat, liver, and fish loaves are best made with milk and eggs. If enough milk is added so that the loaf barely holds its shape, it will be moist after baking. Liver loaf will have a milder flavor if the pan in which it is baked is set in a pan of hot water—same way you bake a custard.

Haddock, halibut, tuna, and salmon are mild flavored fish that appeal most to children. Stronger flavors are likely to be rejected.



Bacon gives less protein than other meats but has energy and flavor value. It can be served to young children if cut in medium-size pieces, cooked slowly until crisp, then drained on absorbent paper.

Peanut butter is a protein food, popular with children.

FRUITS AND VEGETABLES

Furnish minerals to build bones, blood, and tissues
vitamins to promote growth and health
roughage to promote regular elimination

4 to 5 child-size servings daily are recommended.

1 should be grapefruit, orange, or tomato

1 or 2 should be green or yellow vegetables

1 can be potato

Choose vegetables that are young and tender. Children prefer young carrots, new potatoes.

Green Vegetables

Green cabbage

Green beans

Spinach

Celery

Dandelion greens

Turnip greens

Lettuce

Broccoli

Collards

Green peas

Beet greens

Asparagus

Yellow Vegetables

Carrots

Squash

Rutabagas (yellow turnips)

Sweet potatoes

Orange and grapefruit are the best sources of vitamin C. Fresh, canned or frozen juice or fruit can be given. Tomatoes or tomato juice, raw cabbage, green pepper, raw turnips, potatoes cooked in their skins, berries, and melons are other sources of vitamin C. Children often prefer canned tomatoes to fresh ones.

Some children go through stages of preferring fruits to vegetables. In this phase, let them have their 4 or 5 servings daily from the fruit family. It's better than setting up future resistance to vegetables by arguing.

Serve vegetables and fruits in the form your child likes best. Raw vegetables will often be eaten when the same ones cooked will be refused. Flowerets of cauliflower or broccoli, sticks of carrot, turnip, or celery, and leaves of lettuce or cabbage which the child can hold in his hand can be served to any child past two. *All vegetables served raw must be washed thoroughly.*

Mashed potato is not as easy for young children to handle as we think. Unless plenty of milk is added, it tends to stick to the roof of the mouth. Cooked vegetables are preferred in bite-size pieces or in a form children recognize, as flowerets of cauliflower, thin green beans.

Oranges, ripe bananas, peaches, apricots, and apple may be served raw when peeled and given in small pieces. However, some quite young children can chew on a small peeled apple. Ripe strawberries can be served raw. Other fruits should be cooked at first; later they may be eaten raw. *Fresh fruits must be washed well.*

Mild flavored fruits usually are liked best by younger children. Tart fruits, as plums, are more acceptable after three years of age. A combination of a mild fruit and a tart one may accustom children to the latter. Try tart plums and sweet peaches.

Fruits canned in light syrup are better for children and less expensive.

Uncooked dried fruits, well washed, can be given to children past two in place of sweets. Cut them into bite-size pieces.



Cook vegetables carefully for the young critics. Most vegetables should be cooked for a short time in a small amount of water to preserve vitamins and minerals.

Vegetables of strong flavor and odor are the exception. Cauliflower, brussel sprouts, and onions should be cooked quickly in lots of water. Some food value will be lost, but the flavor is milder and more acceptable to young children. By school age, when they've become accustomed to flavors, less water can be used in cooking these varieties.

Preserving the color in vegetables is important. No vegetable should be cooked until it is discolored and mushy.

Cook fruits just long enough to soften skins and fibers. Cook at low heat to retain flavor.

Cook dried fruits according to the up-to-date directions on the package.

Seasoning should be sparing: little salt in vegetables for children and no sugar on fruits unless they are quite tart.

BREAD AND CEREALS Whole-grain or enriched cereals and bread

Furnish starches to supply fuel for all that activity

protein to build muscles and tissues

minerals to build bones and blood

B-complex vitamins to promote health and growth

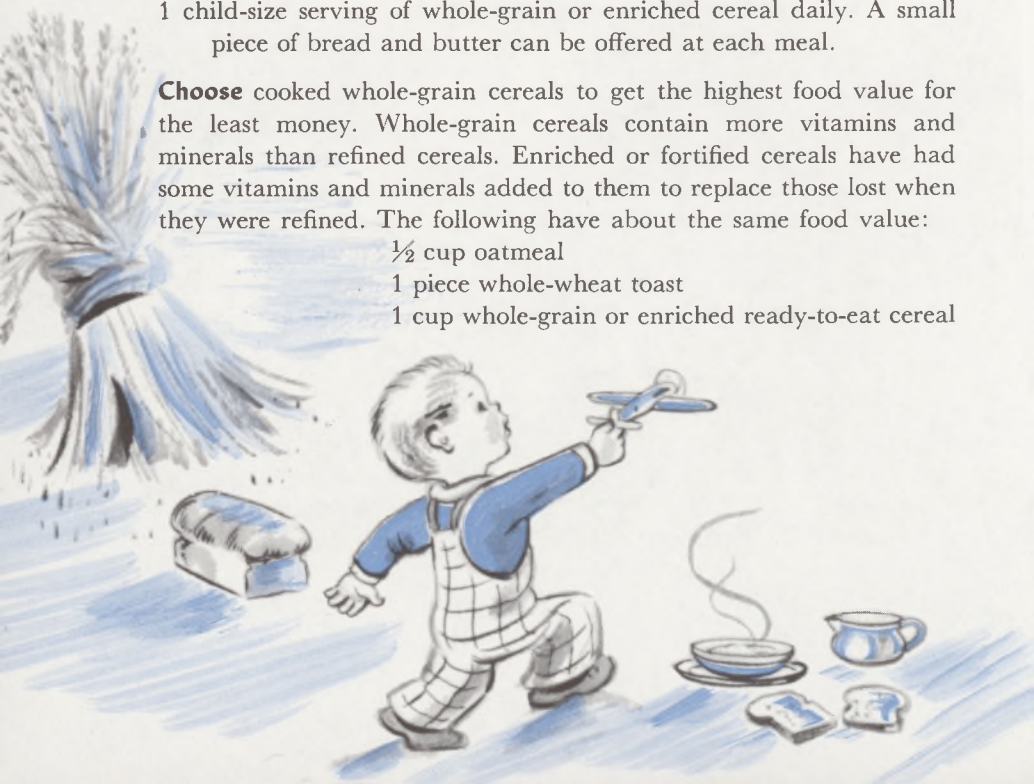
1 child-size serving of whole-grain or enriched cereal daily. A small piece of bread and butter can be offered at each meal.

Choose cooked whole-grain cereals to get the highest food value for the least money. Whole-grain cereals contain more vitamins and minerals than refined cereals. Enriched or fortified cereals have had some vitamins and minerals added to them to replace those lost when they were refined. The following have about the same food value:

½ cup oatmeal

1 piece whole-wheat toast

1 cup whole-grain or enriched ready-to-eat cereal

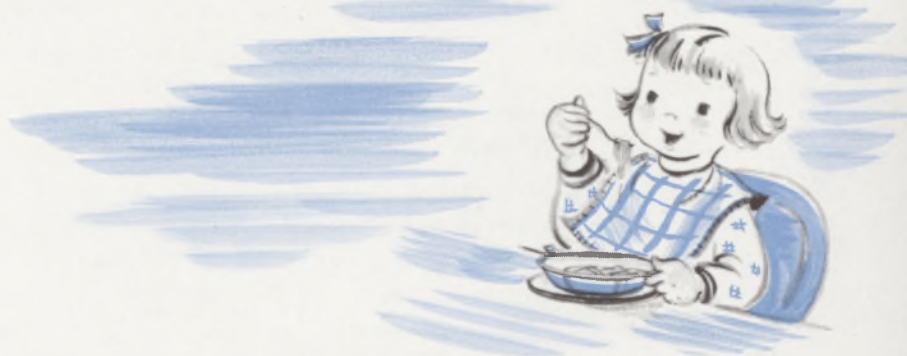


Children whose tummies seem quickly filled on bulky foods will get more food value from cooked cereals. Those who eat larger quantities of cereal comfortably will do as well on ready-to-eat cereal.

Dry cereals absorb a large quantity of milk so they may prove a useful way of getting more milk into the child's diet. Some children also like to pick up bits of dry cereal in their fingers to eat.

Avoid cereals that contain a large quantity of bran. They may irritate the child's digestive tract.

Breads made with milk have more food value. Day-old bread is better than fresh bread for children under six. Boston brown bread may be served occasionally to children past two if it does not have too laxative an effect.



Macaroni, white rice, spaghetti, and noodles are energy-producing foods. They have less food value than the whole-grain and enriched cereal products. They should be combined with meat, cheese, eggs, milk, fruit, or vegetables.

Serve cereals with plenty of milk to be sure the consistency will suit your pre-school child. Serve cooked cereal warm, not hot. Since cereals are high in energy value, they may be served with little or no sugar. A sprinkling of brown sugar is less sweet than one of white sugar and adds color.

Raisins or dates added to cooked cereals often make them more attractive. Fresh fruit may be served on cereal.

Many children prefer toast to bread. Cut slices of bread in halves or quarters so that it can be handled easily by small hands. Bread buttered and browned in the oven often has a special appeal; so do open-face sandwiches with grated carrot or apple slices.



Cook cereals the night before and leave in the top of the double boiler if it rushes you to cook cereal in the morning. Follow manufacturer's directions for cooking to avoid lumps or gumminess which children do not like.

BUTTER

Furnishes easily digested fat to supply fuel for all that activity vitamin A to promote health and growth

Serve softened butter on bread. Cooked vegetables taste better when seasoned with butter. Most of the fat in the young child's diet should come from milk and butter.

VITAMIN D SOURCES

Fish liver oil or other source of vitamin D for your child will be recommended by his doctor. Follow the doctor's orders carefully. Vitamin D milk is a desirable source of this vitamin in the regular food of children. They need more vitamin D than they usually get from sunshine in order to build bones and teeth.

SAMPLE MEAL PLANS

<i>Breakfast</i>	<i>Dinner</i>	<i>Lunch or Supper</i>
Fruit	Meat, chicken, or fish	Milk soup or cereal
Cereal with milk	Potato	Bread and butter
Egg	Green or yellow vegetable	Bits of raw vegetable
Toast and butter	Milk	and of cheese (or a sandwich of cheese or peanut butter)
Milk	Simple dessert, as ice cream, pudding, or fruit	Milk
		Fruit or fruit pudding

No meal plan should be more than a guide to help plan menus that fit your child and your family needs. Most pre-school children prefer such simple meals that they can be served from the family's meals if these are suitably planned. Highly seasoned foods, rich gravies and sauces, and stimulating beverages are not desirable for the youngster. Nor does he usually want them when the food offered him is to his taste.

WHAT ABOUT FOOD BETWEEN MEALS?

Most pre-school children seem to need some. The capacity of their stomachs is small. They can't hold much food at one time. Their energy needs are great. They eat as much as they can at one meal and then find the stretch until the next one too long. Without food between meals, they become over-tired and cross.

Food between meals is best offered at the same time each day. Milk, fruit juice, fruit, plain crackers spread with a thin layer of cottage cheese or peanut butter offer most value. (Cookies, candy, cake, bread and jelly may keep him from being hungry at mealtime. Such sweet foods, if offered, should come at the end of a meal.)

If, in spite of regular meals and in-between snacks, your child makes a nuisance of himself going to the cupboard or the refrigerator, he may need more protein foods: milk, cheese, eggs, meat. Consider, too, the possibility of some other cause besides actual physical hunger. It may be emotional. Sometimes boredom, loneliness, or a need for more affection prompts this. New play equipment, playmates, or more attention from you may be his real need rather than food. Given these he is likely to forget to forage.



How to Bring Children and Foods Together Happily

Why happily?

Because children's minds and emotions are developing, too. We try to avoid severe conflicts over food. We do this because young children show such strong feelings of frustration or satisfaction about eating. A child's feelings about his feeding experiences may affect the way he is able to meet other situations in life. When we bring children and food together happily, the children's emotional satisfaction helps build mental health. Pleasant feeding experiences are as important as proper food.

For happy mealtime a child needs:

1. Play, rest, sleep, and that "clean feeling."
2. Attractive food.
3. Small servings.
4. Some freedom to choose his own food.
5. Some freedom to eat in his own way.
6. Relaxed parents.

1. Play, rest, sleep, and that "clean feeling."

Eating is fun for the hungry child. Growing, active youngsters are hungry, but a tired, excited child cannot enjoy his food any more than can an adult in that state.

The individual child's need for sleep varies as does his need for food. Each child will develop his own regular pattern for sleep. Help him to satisfy his need fully by making him comfortable at naptime and bedtime. His body requires sleep and rest to use food to build bone and muscle.

Give him a chance to quiet down before he eats. The process of freshening up with its accompanying "clean feeling" can be relaxing and quieting, if "too much" is not expected. Your four-year-old may want to wash his hands alone. Your five-year-old may wash his face quite acceptably.



2. Attractive food.

How food *looks, tastes, and feels in their mouths* is important in making it attractive to children.

Bright colors—yellow carrots, bright green beans, orange gelatin, egg yolk beaten into white sauce—make the child's plate appealing. Gay colors in cups, plates, and table mats set in a sunny spot make his mealtime setting a happy one.

Mild and delicate flavors in foods are the child's choice. Milk's mild flavor has a soothing pleasure for him carried over from his baby days, if no unnatural resistance has crept in through some unpleasant conflict or experience.

Moisture in meat and eggs . . .

Smooth, slick consistency for milk soups and puddings . . .

Crisp, raw fruits and vegetables . . .

are the textures preferred by most young children.

3. Small servings.

A heaped up plate is discouraging to a young child. In the first place, foods are most attractive to him if each one stands out separately from others on his plate. In the second place, he knows instinctively that he cannot eat so much.

Better to put a teaspoon of each food on the younger child's plate and let him ask for another of those he wants. The teaspoons, then, may grow to become tablespoons.

4. Some freedom to choose his own foods.

Even infants show definite food preferences. As a baby, your child may have lapped up one vegetable but wrinkled his nose and shut his mouth tightly against another. He has already shown, too, that his appetite varies from one meal to another and from day to day.





The food he chooses to eat may be related to his body needs. His rate of growth, his activities, and how he feels will all influence *how much* he wants to eat. Unusual excitement, traveling, visitors in his home, hot weather, teething, the beginning of an illness, or any emotional upset will affect his appetite. Before you coax or urge

him to eat, think how you feel when someone forces food on you that you do not want.

When you offer a new food serve old favorites along with it. If he is not willing to give the new food a try, don't let him think it matters. When you offer it another day he may want a taste.

Desserts should be planned as part of a meal. Fruits, custards, milk desserts all contribute to health and growth. If the child wants to eat them along with the rest of his meal, why not? Insisting that he eat his vegetables first only makes them less desirable.

Children who are given foods they like and can decide for themselves how much they will eat, enjoy eating. Joy in eating leads naturally to interest in a variety of foods.

5. Some freedom to eat in his own way.

Of course he will feed himself with his fingers. Small sandwiches and raw vegetables are intended to be eaten that way. If he puts his hands in his pudding, why scold? Maybe there's logic in feeling food with your fingers before you touch it with your tongue.

Table manners cannot be expected until after:

He has learned to eat a variety of foods.

He has grown enough to be able to handle food and eating utensils skillfully.

He feels part of a group.

A comfortable chair from which his feet rest comfortably on a foot rest or on the floor is important to mealtime comfort. A spoon which has a straight, short handle (not a curved baby spoon) is easiest for him to handle.

Whether he should eat at the table with his family depends upon *how happy he and they can be eating together*. He may be messy and restless. If they feel critical, he had better eat by himself until he is grown enough to meet their standards.

Even after he is able to feed himself most of the time, he occasionally may want help. Fatigue, illness, and emotional upset, or strange surroundings can make him need the comfort of having you help him. Giving him assistance when he needs it helps him go forward happily and confidently again.

6. Relaxed parents.

Most of us are relieved to learn that the easy way is the best way to feed young children. Suitable food served in friendly surroundings, without worry about *what, how much, or how* he eats is a welcome recommendation to most of us.

Because some of us learned rigid ideas about child feeding, we may sometimes find the new attitude confusing or difficult to follow. If you have worried about your child's feeding habits you will not stop immediately. But it has been demonstrated repeatedly that when parents do stop worrying, children start eating better.

If you really think your child does not eat enough, or believe he is not gaining as he should, it is a good idea to take him to your doctor for a physical examination. If he is found to be all right, you can take your mind off *how much* he eats and focus it on *how to make mealtime fun*.



