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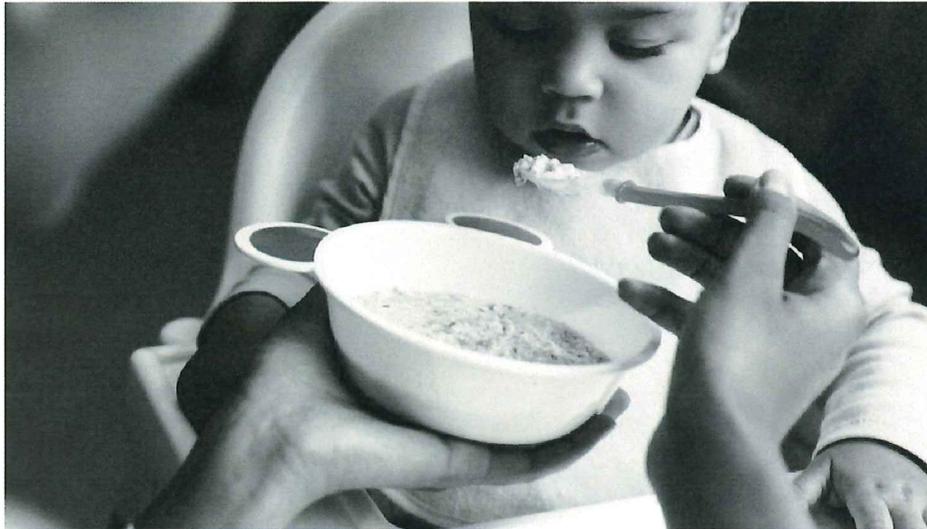
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Top 5: Mealtime Tips for a Healthy Start

Physical Health & Nutrition

(https://www.zerotothree.org/issue_area/physical-health-nutrition/?post-type=resource)

January 23, 2019



Many of us adults are concerned with trying to fuel our bodies with the right foods—in the right amounts. Did you know that parents can help children develop these healthy eating habits beginning in the first months of life? Here's how.

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1. For babies, it's all about the milk (or formula).

Help babies learn to recognize their body's signs of hunger (and learn to trust that you're there to feed them) by feeding them "on demand." This means feeding babies whenever they show hunger cues (like smacking their lips, rooting, crying, fussing). Feed babies until they show you signs that they're full—turning away from the bottle, playing but not actively sucking, falling asleep, etc.

2. For toddlers, try a responsive feeding approach.

Responsive feeding divides the responsibility for meals and snacks between you and your child.

Your job: Provide a nurturing mealtime environment and offer healthy meals and snacks (in age-appropriate servings) to children.

Your child's job: Decide what and how much to eat.

3. Teach young children what hungry and full feel like.

Responsive feeding helps children learn to listen to their body's signals of hunger and fullness. You can ask your toddler what her tummy feels like when she's had enough to eat, and respect when she says she's full. Over time, children learn to stop eating when they are full, reducing their risk of being overweight later in life.

4. Responsive feeding is not spoiling.

Many parents think that giving children the choice of when to stop eating means they will only eat what they like, or eat a little and beg for snacks later. You may see these behaviors in the short term. But by providing children with a variety of foods at mealtimes (both familiar foods and new foods) and offering healthy snacks, over time, they will learn to eat until they are full and then stop.

5. Responsive feeding is the perfect recipe for picky eaters.

Responsive feeding eliminates the power struggle that often happens when a picky eater refuses to try new foods or “take just one bite.” Remember:

- You may need to offer a new food 10 to 15 times before your child will accept it. That calls for a lot of patience. You can help: Be a role model for eating healthy foods.
- “Trying” a new food doesn’t mean your child has to eat it. Even a lick (we know, it’s a little gross) counts as a try.
- Make your child a part of meal prep—let him help mix or pour ingredients. Research shows that children are more likely to taste new foods if they were part of the preparation.

(<https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/services/zero-to-three-parent-resources>)

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