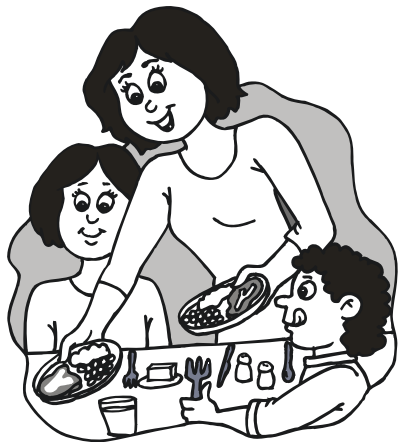




Children are precious to their parents. Parents worry about the bad eating habit of their children. If you want to help your children improve their eating habit, you have to stick to the principles of a balanced diet. You also have to understand the causes of bad eating habit and carry out your improvement measures consistently.



Eating too slow

Generally, if children are not unwell, can concentrate and are interested in their food, they can finish a normal meal within a reasonable period of time. Acceptable time limit for a meal is around 30 to 45 minutes. If they eat too slow, you should find out the reasons behind in order to help them improve.

Reasons

- The child is just slow, even in other daily activities
- The child wants the parents to spend more time with him/her
- Distracted by other things such as TV or toys
- Food is too hard or need more time to chew

DOs

- ✓ Consider the young age of your child and accept his/her relatively slow action
- ✓ Arrange physical activities to enhance the dexterity of your child
- ✓ Spend adequate time with your child e.g. spend some time after the meal to communicate with him/her. Let your child understand that meal-time is not the only period he/she can meet you and that you will still be there even after the meal
- ✓ Arrange a relaxed eating environment without other distractions
- ✓ Train your child to finish a meal within a reasonable period of time. Do not set the initial target too high. Let your child have a taste of success first. Then raise your requirement gradually after he/she is accustomed to the training.

DON'Ts

- ✗ Feed your child when you find that he/she is too slow. This will reinforce the bad eating habit and even make him/her over-dependent
- ✗ Prepare food which is too hard or in a large amount, which requires more time to chew



No Appetite

If your child has no appetite, he/she will have “no desire to eat”, or “never eat any rice”, or “eat very little”. Usually, when your child is sick (e.g. suffering from a flu, aphthous ulcer, toothache or stomachache, etc.), he/she will lose their appetite. However, when he/she recovers, the appetite will become normal again. If there are other reasons affecting the appetite, you should find out the reasons and try to solve the problem.

Reasons

- Distracted by e.g. TV, comics, toys, etc.
- Unhappy eating atmosphere, or too strict with table manners
- Unattractive dishes
- Some children use this to attract the attention of their parents. Some may even blackmail their parents into acceding to their requests
- Parents’ over expectation of their child’s appetite
- Stress or worries
- Have too much snacks before meals

DOs

- ✓ Teach your child how to relieve stress
- ✓ People have different capacities for food. Do not force your child to eat the same amount every meal
- ✓ Let your child suggest the dishes. Let him/her help in cooking and setting the table to arouse his/her interest in food
- ✓ Change the varieties of dishes from time to time and mind the cooking method
- ✓ Increase the amount of physical activity for your child to improve his/her appetite
- ✓ Healthy snacks such as skimmed milk, sandwiches, fruits, etc. can be given to your child between meals to give him/her more nutrients

DON'Ts

- ✗ Give snacks or drink just before a meal. This will affect the appetite
- ✗ Store too much snacks and instant noodles at home. Children may lose their appetite in meals if they are too fond of eating those unhealthy snacks

Picky on Food

People have different preferences for food. Try to accept these individual differences. However, if the situation is serious, you should do something about it.

Reasons

- Individual preferences
- Following other people's behaviour
- Have some misunderstanding or unhappy experience towards certain food



DOs

- ✓ Always encourage your child to eat different kinds of food
- ✓ Let your child make the choice within a limited range. For example, let him/her choose between rice and rice noodles, pork and beef, cabbage and choy sum, etc. Remember to change the varieties from time to time so that your child can absorb various nutrients from different foods
- ✓ Explain to your child the advantages of different foods through activities (e.g. reading books or playing games). You can also bring your child to the market to buy food in order to enhance his/her knowledge and arouse his/her interest in food
- ✓ When you cook, pay attention to your cooking skills, the taste, the presentation and the temperature of the food and the choice of side dishes. Sometimes your child's food preferences will change if you make some efforts to improve your cooking
- ✓ Have a balanced diet in order to set a good example for your child
- ✓ Start from a small amount when a certain kind of food is not your child's favorite. Let your child get used to it before you increase the amount

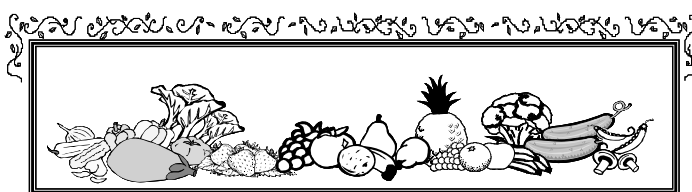
DON'Ts

- * Fry/deep fry the food just so that your child will eat more. This will cause obesity
- * Satisfy your child with food other than that served in meals. For example, give your child instant noodles or snacks when he/she does not eat enough during dinner. He/she will never learn to eat proper meals
- * Scold your child or force him/her to eat during

the meal. This will destroy the eating atmosphere and affect your relationship, and possibly make your child resent eating even more

Eating Disorders

Eating disorders include anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa. Victims are mostly young people. Causes are still unknown but may be related to psychological factors, emotions, self image as well as family factors. Although victims of anorexia nervosa are thin, they have an intense fear of gaining weight. They refuse to eat normally and thus become malnourished. Victims of bulimia nervosa usually have normal body weight or are slightly over-weight, and they regularly binge on food secretly. Victims of both problems use different methods to control their weight, such as taking laxatives, diuretics, self-induced vomiting or excessive exercises. Treatments for eating disorders include psychological counselling, psychiatric treatment, reshaping the eating habit, family support and quitting of drugs.



Help Your Children to Improve Their Eating Habit



Student Health Service
Department of Health
www.studenthealth.gov.hk
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