



Parents as Models, Teachers, and Mediators

A letter series from the OSU Extension Service



Children aren't born with a set of food habits. They learn which foods to eat, how much to eat, and when to eat as they interact with people around them. Family members have a great influence on this learning process.

Parents play many roles as they guide their children's developing food habits: model, teacher, mediator, provider, stage manager, and director. We'll discuss these in the four lessons of *Food for Tots*.

Parents as models

When couples marry, two sets of food habits are blended. There undoubtedly will be both likenesses and differences in types of food eaten, the ways they're prepared, and when they're eaten. Young children learn these food habits that are unique to their family.

Talk about it . . .

Analyze your food likes and dislikes. Make two columns on a sheet of paper. List five foods you like that were served at a family meal in the past month. Do the same for five foods you don't like. Could you easily think of foods you disliked? What does this suggest about your influence on family meals? Compare your list with other family members' lists of likes and dislikes. (Children could draw pictures.) Are they alike?

Are there some foods you never eat or taste? Why or why not? What do you do when served a food you don't like? What do you expect your child to do?

Talk about it . . .

What were some of your favorite childhood foods? As an adult, how often do you eat them?

Do you eat foods today that seemed strange or unappetizing when first introduced to you?

Compare your current food habits with those of the family in which you grew up. How have they changed? (Consider which foods are served, who prepares them, how many meals are eaten, and who eats meals together.)

How have you and your spouse or partner blended the food habits that you learned as children?

Have you started any new food traditions, such as eating certain foods on special occasions?

Analyze a grocery list. Why did you buy those foods for your family? (Consider the influences of cost, taste, convenience, nutritional value.) Would you like to change your family food habits? If so, how?

Although researchers can't say for sure how young children develop food preferences, parents and children often have similar tastes. The simplest explanation is that the same foods are available for all family members to eat. However, imitation is important, too. Children may copy what they see others eating. Parents, therefore, are models. A mother who drinks diet soft drinks all day is sending an unspoken message to her child. A father who says "I don't like peas—don't give me any," is likewise a model. Brothers and sisters who fight at the table also give messages about suitable mealtime behavior.



Parents as teachers

Parents have the primary responsibility for teaching their young children about a good diet. Sometimes parents and children talk together about kinds of food needed for good health. These talks might take place in grocery store aisles, in front of the television, or at the dinner table. At other times, teaching may be less formal. For example, children get interested in food when they help prepare it.

Food handling skills depend on muscular development and coordination of the child. A 2-year-old can most easily learn food handling tasks that require big arm muscles (such as scrubbing, tearing, breaking, and snapping). Next, the child develops coordination of hand muscles needed for pouring, spreading, and mixing. When finger dexterity develops, a child can roll, peel, and mash. Finally, the older preschooler develops fine motor coordination needed for cutting and grating.

Kitchen safety should be the first lesson. Teach your child the meaning of “hot,” “heavy,” and “sharp.” An adult must be responsible for handling hot pots and pans, cooking on the range, using electrical appliances such as blenders, and cutting with sharp knives.

Next, teach your young child about kitchen cleanliness. Two-year-olds can learn to wash their hands and to wipe counters and table tops. Sponges may be easier to hold than cloths. Don't worry about motions your child uses, but do give hints on how to tell if the job is done. Are all the spills gone? Are there any crumbs? Make sure your child knows which

Talk about it . . .

How often do you and your child talk about the importance of eating nutritious foods? Where do these talks take place?

What food preparation activities has your child tried? What else could be done in the kitchen?

What foods do you enjoy preparing together as a family?

cloths or sponges are for the floor and which are for counters and table tops.

Scrubbing. A young child can use a brush or sponge to wash potatoes, carrots, and many fruits. Lay a cloth on the counter edge in front of the sink to help prevent water from spilling on the floor.

Tearing, breaking, and snapping. Young children can tear lettuce for salad, break bananas for snacking, or snap green beans for cooking.

Pouring. Pouring skills develop as children play in the sandbox, bathtub, or kitchen sink. The task is easier if you follow this advice: Give your child a small, lightweight pitcher to use.

Mark a “full line” on a glass with a rubber band or waxed pencil so your child knows when to stop pouring.

Tell your child to hold the handle of the pitcher with one hand and guide the spout with the other hand. This also helps to balance the pitcher.

Spreading. A 3-year-old can use a dull table knife for spreading. (Plastic utensils may break and discourage the child.) Show how to hold the knife to spread butter, margarine, or peanut butter on breads, crackers, celery, or fruit slices. Before starting, count out the amount that can be eaten by the child or family members to discourage too much spreading practice.

Mixing. A 3-year-old can also use arm and hand muscles to stir food mixtures such as pancakes and tossed salad. Make sure your child starts with clean hands and a clean

work area. Use a mixing container that holds twice the amount of the recipe. Put a damp cloth under the bowl to help keep it from slipping.

Children can use their hands as they learn to mix. This lets them feel the texture of ingredients and see changes as the mixing goes along. Wooden spoons and rubber spatulas can also be used, especially when mixtures are runny and easy to stir.

Five-year-olds can use rotary beaters by themselves. Electric mixers should not be used unless you're there to supervise.

Peeling. Children under 4 years can begin peeling by shucking corn. You'll need to help remove the silk.

A 4-year-old child has the finger dexterity needed to peel oranges, shrimp, and hard-cooked eggs.

Rolling with hands. Show your child how to roll food into a ball using both hands. Try cheese balls, meat balls, and cookie or yeast dough.

Mashing. A 4-year-old child is able to mash with a fork. Select a flat-bottomed container your child can hang on to tightly. Try soft bananas (for bread), cooked potatoes, stewed pumpkin (for pie), cooked eggs (for sandwiches), or cooked dried beans (for dip).

Cutting. A 5-year-old can use a table knife for cutting soft foods such as cooked potatoes, hard-cooked eggs, and bananas. Show your child how to handle knives safely: the sharp edge should point down when cutting; fingers should be away from the blade; knives should be passed handle first; knives should be carried blade-down and the child should not run.



Sugared cereals, candy, snacks, and drinks are advertised most often during children's television programming. Children are given the message that these foods are good for them and fun to eat. Because they are unable to pick out these misleading advertising messages, young children believe them and often ask their parents to buy advertised products.

Parents can lessen the impact of advertising by helping children understand what they see: point out the difference between commercials and TV shows; explain that advertising sells foods by making them sound appealing; and talk about the nutritional merits of advertised foods.

Talk about it . . .

Where is each television set in your home? How often do family members watch TV?

Does TV help or hinder interaction among your family members?

How does television advertising affect your child's food habits?

How often do you talk about advertised foods with your child? Where do these talks take place?

Do you buy advertised foods that your child requests? Why or why not?

Hands-on food experiences lead to more than positive attitudes toward eating a variety of foods. Children develop coordination as they become more skillful. As they measure ingredients, they learn about math. They learn to tell the differences among colors, shapes, and textures. Also they learn new words such as knead, mash.

Parents as mediators

Although family members are the strongest influence on the development of children's food habits, television also plays an important role. Ninety-eight percent of American homes have at least one television set. On the average, preschool children watch more than 25 hours of television a week. Such watching obviously limits chances for physical activity and interaction with others. Also, TV-watching affects the food choices a child makes.

A letter series from the OSU Extension Service

Lesson 1

Parents as Models, Teachers, and Mediators



Dear Parents: We're pleased that you've enrolled in this OSU Extension home study course. **Food for Tots** focuses on how you, as a parent, influence the food habits of your children. The letters explore the many roles you play and answer questions you've asked about feeding your children between ages 2 and 5. There are four lessons in the letter series. We encourage you and your family to talk about each one. This first letter concentrates on you, the parent, as a model, teacher, and mediator.

Carolyn Raab
Extension foods and nutrition specialist



Carolyn Raab, Extension foods and nutrition specialist, Oregon State University; with assistance from Donna Gregerson, Extension home economist, Oregon State University Extension Service; and Janet Jacobson, student, Food Systems Management, Oregon State University. Extension program materials from Virginia, New York, and Washington were used in preparation of this publication.

Extension Service, Oregon State University, Corvallis, O.E. Smith, director. Produced and distributed in furtherance of the Acts of Congress of May 8 and June 30, 1914. Extension work is a cooperative program of Oregon State University, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and Oregon counties. Oregon State University Extension Service offers educational programs, activities, and materials without regard to race, color, national origin, sex, age, or disability as required by Title IV of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Oregon State University Extension Service is an Equal Opportunity Employer.



Lesson 2 Parents as Providers

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Parents are sometimes called “gatekeepers” because they determine what foods are available for children to eat at home. By providing

a variety of nutritious foods, you expose your child to many good food choices.

All family members need the same nutrients for good health. However, different amounts are

needed depending on age (adults need more than children), sex (men require more of many nutrients because they are larger), and stage of growth (needs are high during adolescence and pregnancy).

Key Nutrients	Function	Good Sources
Protein	Builds and repairs body tissues.	Meat, poultry, fish, eggs, peanut butter, dried beans, and peas.
Vitamin A	Helps eyes adjust to dim light. Helps keep lining of mouth, nose, throat and digestive system healthy. Helps keep skin healthy.	Liver, dark green and deep yellow vegetables (such as broccoli, dark greens, pumpkin, sweet potatoes), cantaloupe, egg yolk, whole milk, and fortified low-fat products.
Vitamin D	Helps body use calcium and phosphorus to build strong bones and teeth.	Fortified milk, fish liver oils, liver, fatty fish.
Vitamin E	Helps protect other nutrients and cell membranes from destruction by oxygen.	Vegetable oils (such as soybean, cottonseed corn), wheat germ, liver, whole grains.
Vitamin K	Helps blood to clot.	Green leafy vegetables, milk products.
Thiamin (vitamin B1)	Helps release energy from foods. Helps keep nervous system healthy.	Pork, enriched and whole grains, dried beans and peas, liver.
Riboflavin (vitamin B2)	Helps release energy from food.	Milk and milk products, enriched grain products, meats, dark leafy greens, liver.
Niacin	Helps release energy from food. Keeps nervous system and skin healthy.	Poultry, fish, peanuts, enriched and whole grains.
Pyridoxine (vitamin B6)	Helps the body use protein and other nutrients.	Meat, poultry, fish, dried beans and peas, bananas, potatoes, whole grains, peanut butter.
Folacin	Helps body make genetic material and use protein. Helps build red blood cells.	Leafy greens, oranges, dried beans and peas, liver, whole grains, eggs.
Vitamin B12	Helps body make genetic material. Helps build red blood cells.	Animal protein sources: clams, oysters, liver meat, milk, poultry, fish.
Vitamin C	Helps form collagen which holds body tissues together. Helps body absorb iron.	Citrus fruits, cabbage, potatoes, tomatoes, broccoli, peas, strawberries, watermelon, cantaloupe.
Calcium	Helps build bones and teeth. Helps muscles to contract and blood to clot.	Milk, yogurt, cheese, ice cream.
Phosphorus	Helps build bones and teeth and release energy from food.	Milk products, meats, eggs, legumes, whole grains.
Magnesium	Helps regulate various body processes and contractions of nerves and muscles.	Legumes, nuts, whole grains, milk, leafy greens.
Iron	Combines with protein to form hemoglobin which carries oxygen in the blood.	Meats, liver, oysters, legumes, enriched and whole grain cereals, leafy green vegetables.
Zinc	Helps promote sexual maturation, healing of wounds, and sense of taste.	Meat, poultry, oysters, legumes, whole grains.
Iodine	Becomes part of thyroid hormones.	Seafood, iodized salt.
Selenium	Helps protect body cells from destruction by oxygen.	Seafood, kidney, liver.

The specific amount of a nutrient needed to maintain health is called a Recommended Dietary Allowance (RDA). There are RDAs for both sexes in 10 age categories from infancy to older age. The functions and food sources of nutrients with RDAs are shown in the Key Nutrient chart. Although our bodies also need other nutrients, more research is needed before specific requirements can be set.

Food composition tables could be used to plan meals that provide enough nutrients for all family members. However, this would be a time-consuming task even with a computer. Instead, nutritionists have developed a shorthand system. By grouping foods with similar nutrient values together, an easy-to-remember guide has been developed. Five types of food are included in the Food Guide Pyramid. These should be part of your daily family diet:

Eat **bread, cereals, rice, and pasta** for carbohydrate, B vitamins, and iron.

Eat **vegetables** for fiber, vitamins A, C, and folate.

Eat **fruit** for vitamins A and C and for potassium.

Eat **milk, yogurt, and cheese** for calcium, protein, and vitamin D.

Eat **meat, poultry, fish, dry beans, eggs, and nuts** for protein, B vitamins, iron, and zinc.

Meals and snacks will also include "other" foods such as fats (margarine, butter), oils, and sweets. While these provide additional calories, they should be used sparingly because they are poor nutrient sources.

Everyone needs to eat a variety of foods for good health. The Food Guide Pyramid shows that carbohydrate-rich foods form the foundation of a healthy diet.

Young children need these amounts:

- 6 servings Bread group
- 3 servings Vegetable group
- 2 servings Fruit group
- 2 servings Milk group
- 2 servings Meat group

Serving sizes will vary for family members. A very general rule is to serve young children 1 Tablespoon of food per year of age (about 1/4 to 1/3 of an adult serving). This will vary depending on the food served.

Standard servings for children

	Serving size	
	for 2-3 years	for 4-5 years
Fruits and vegetables		
raw	1/2 med.	1/2 -1 med.
cooked	2-3 Tbsp	4-5 Tbsp
juice	1/3 -1/2 cup	1/2 cup
Breads and cereals		
bread	1/2 slice	1/2 -1 slice
cooked cereal, rice, or pasta	1/4 -1/3 cup	1/4 -1/2 cup
ready-to-eat	1/3 cup	1/2 cup
Milk and milk products		
milk, yogurt	1/2 -3/4 cup	3/4 cup
custard, milk pudding	4-6 Tbsp	6 Tbsp
cheese (1 oz = 1" cube)	2/3 -1 oz	1 oz
Meat and meat alternates		
meat, poultry, fish	2-3 Tbsp (1 oz)	4 Tbsp (2 oz)
eggs	1	1
peanut butter	1-2 Tbsp	2-3 Tbsp
cooked dried beans or peas	1/3 cup	1/2 cup



How can I tell whether my child is getting nutrients that are needed?

You can rate your child's diet in this way:

- On a sheet of paper, make three columns like those in the diet rating example. Write down everything your child has eaten for the past 24 hours in column A—amounts of food as well as types.

- Use the standard servings for children chart to fill in column B.

- Divide the amounts actually eaten (A) by the standard serving size (B) to calculate the number of servings of each food that your child ate. Write this in column C. For example, 1 cup milk equals two 1/2-cup servings for a 2-year-old.

- Transfer each food eaten to the correct block in the Food Guide Pyramid. Each numbered line counts as one serving. If your child ate two standard-size servings of a food, write that food down twice to fill two lines. If your child ate one-half of a standard serving, you'll need to match that food with another partial serving to add up to one serving.

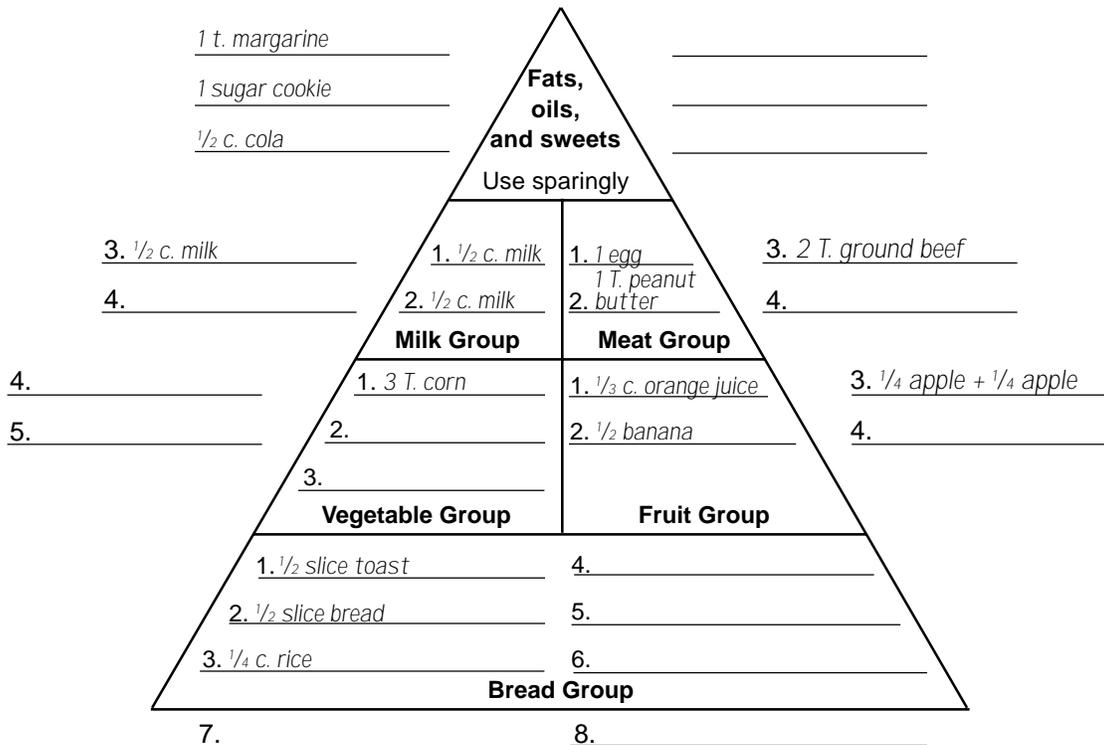
When all lines inside the Pyramid are filled, continue listing foods on the numbered lines outside the blocks. Put fats, oils, and sweets beside the tip of the Pyramid.

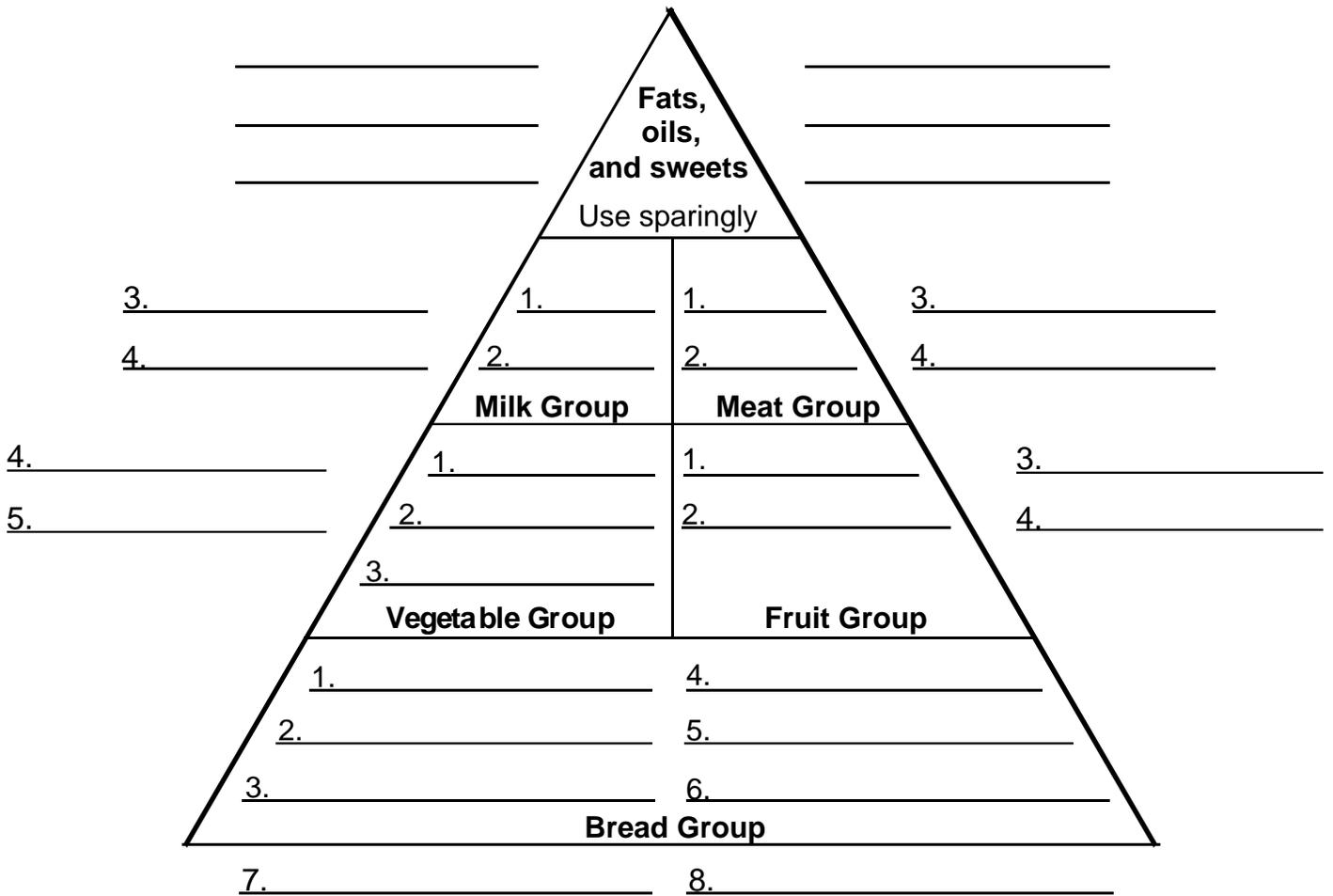
Talk about it. . .

Are there any blank lines inside the Pyramid? What foods could you add to your child's diet to fill them? Rate your child's diet again on another day. Are there differences? Similarities?

Diet Rating Example

(A) Foods eaten during 24 hours	(B) Serving size 2-year-old	(C) Servings eaten during 24 hours
1/3 cup orange juice	1/3-1/2 cup	1
1 egg	1	1
1/2 slice toast	1/2 slice	1
1 tsp margarine	—	—
1/2 cup milk	1/2 cup	1
1/2 banana	1/2 medium	1
1 cup milk	1/2 cup	2
1 Tbsp peanut butter	1-2 Tbsp	1
1/2 slice bread	1/2 slice	1
1 sugar cookie	—	—
1/2 cup cola	—	—
1/4 apple	1/2 medium	1/2
2 Tbsp ground beef	2-3 Tbsp	1
3 Tbsp corn	2-3 Tbsp	1
1/4 cup rice	1/4-1/3 cup	1
1/4 apple	1/2 medium	1/2
1/2 cup milk	1/2-3/4 cup	1







How can I tell what nutrients are in the foods I serve my family?

Read labels on packages to learn about the nutrient content of foods. New food labels give information on fat, cholesterol, sodium, carbohydrate, protein, vitamins A and C, iron,

Computer software programs are also a source of nutrient information. Several diet analysis programs are on the market. Some use U.S.D.A. information in their databases.

ting extra nutrients. Read the label to determine amounts provided.

A doctor may recommend a supplement for a few days if your child is eating poorly, but this is not a good long-term solution. No supplement will provide all necessary nutrients.

If you give your child a vitamin/mineral supplement, be sure to



and calcium in a serving.

Food composition tables include nutrient information for both fresh and preserved foods. *Nutritive Value of Foods* (HG 72) is a useful listing of about 1,000 foods. Your county Extension office can tell you how to buy a copy of this U.S. Department of Agriculture bulletin.



Does my child need vitamin/mineral supplements?

If there were no blank lines inside the rating wheel, your child is most likely getting all necessary nutrients. If there are nutrient gaps, try to add some foods to fill them. Keep in mind that a child who eats fortified breakfast cereals is already get-

read the label. Overdoses can be harmful. Make sure that the pill or liquid does not have more than 100 percent of the U.S. RDA (Recommended Daily Allowance) for any one nutrient.

Treat a vitamin/mineral supplement as you would any "medicine." Keep it out of reach and don't refer to it as "candy."

Lesson 2 Parents as Providers



Dear Parents: *The second letter in your OSU Extension Service home study course, **Food for Tots**, provides you with information about children's nutritional needs. You will find suggestions for daily servings of the four major food groups that make up a balanced diet. A rating wheel helps you analyze your child's diet and determine where you, as parent and provider, can help make improvements.*

Carolyn Raab
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Parents as stage managers

Parents set the stage for good food habits. The parent-child relationship can affect how well the child eats. Most research suggests that young children have better diets when their parents give them positive feedback. Other studies have shown that conflict and stress in the family may be linked to poor diets.

The style of the parent-child interaction may even play a role in the development of obesity and other eating disorders. In one study, overweight children received less appropriate attention from their mothers while they were eating together. On the other hand, mothers of normal-weight children responded more often with encouragement and approval.

A pleasant mealtime atmosphere can set the stage for development of good food habits. It will influence what foods children accept and how much they enjoy eating. Make meals a time for relaxed family interaction. Limit distractions to let your child focus on eating. Include your child in mealtime conversation and praise good behavior at the table. (This helps prevent children's attention-getting tactics!) Don't force your child to sit still until everyone else is through eating. Above all, remember that your child learns by watching how you eat and behave at the table!



How can I keep my child from gaining too much weight?

Several factors may work together to influence the development of obesity. These may include:

- **Lack of exercise.** Children who constantly watch TV miss out on needed exercise.

- **Poor food choices.** High-calorie foods are poor choices when children are inactive or growing slowly.

- **Use of foods as rewards or pacifiers.** When food is used as a bribe or reward, children learn that problems are solved by eating.

- **Force feeding or large portions.** Children may learn to tie eating with parental approval and love rather than hunger.

- **Irregular meals and snacks.** Children cannot judge how much to eat when they don't know how long it will be until they eat again.

Your family doctor can determine whether your child weighs more than other children of the same height. If your child is overweight, dieting isn't wise. Young children need enough calories for growth. Let them "grow into" their weight by keeping calories at a constant level as they grow taller. Also, plan family activities that provide chances for exercising.

Keep lower-calorie snacks on hand for overweight children such as celery sticks, apple slices, orange sections, tomato juice, and unsweetened breakfast cereals. Limit high-calorie/low-nutrient snack foods like chips and soft drinks. Offer second helpings of lower-calorie foods at meals in place of rich desserts. Praise your child when good food choices are made.

Talk about it . . .

How would you describe the atmosphere during your meals? Does everyone in your family eat together? Is the TV on? What do you talk about?

Identify one way you would like mealtimes to be different. Make a plan for reaching that goal. Who needs to be involved? What will each person do? When will you evaluate how well you've done?

How do you give feedback to your child during mealtime? Do you communicate your expectations in a positive way? Are you consistent from one time to the next?

Parents as directors

In addition to setting the stage, parents are responsible for directing the child-feeding activity. Children eat best when parents recognize and respond in suitable ways to their needs. You'll have to be aware of feeding cues coming from your child.

Feeding is successful when parents are in tune with children's hunger, fullness, food preferences, and eating skills. Be sensitive to your child's developmental readiness to try new eating skills. For example, they'll be ready to use utensils when they develop muscle coordination in their hands. Watch for cues as they play with their toys.



Other feeding cues to recognize are signs of hunger and fullness. Children shouldn't be forced to clean their plates if they're full. Neither should a hungry child be forced to wait until mealtime to eat. A light snack such as a cracker or an apple slice can carry them over without ruining their appetite.

Give positive direction and feedback as children try new behaviors or make mistakes. For example, show your child how to hold a cup. If there are spills, praise the child for trying. Be consistent—not rigid one time and indifferent the next. Mixed messages can be confusing to a child.

Set (and enforce) some mealtime standards: a regular meal and snack schedule; a place for your child to sit comfortably while eating; a "preparation ritual" that includes handwashing.



What should I do when my child is on a "food jag?"

Eating one food for days on end is common during the preschool years. A preference for one special food is usually short-lived. Offer other foods, but don't force your child to eat them. In time, your child will usually turn to other available foods.

If the favorite food is not very nutritious, think about some creative ways to introduce an additional food with nutritional merits. For example, milk supplies protein and calcium. Try fortifying it with orange juice or blended fruit. If all else fails, try coloring the milk blue! A doctor may

recommend a vitamin pill if your child's diet is missing important nutrients for a prolonged time.



Should I be concerned when my child has a poor appetite?

Day-to-day variation in a young child's appetite is common. There are several possible causes:

- **Amount of physical activity.**

On active days, your child will probably be hungrier than on quiet days.

- **Inappropriate snacking.**

Snacking too frequently or too close to meals could decrease your child's appetite.

- **Emotional distress.** A child who is upset or tired may not eat well.

- **Illness.** Appetite will be affected when a child isn't feeling well.

- **Stage of growth.** Appetite decreases when growth slows (at about 18–24 months).

Before worrying about your child's appetite, check your own expectations. Too often parents overestimate their child's food needs and judge their intake by what an adult might eat.

Be patient if you do have concerns about your child's appetite. If your child is healthy and growing steadily, a small appetite is probably nothing to worry about. On days when appetite seems smaller, let your child eat when hungry and offer foods that are enjoyed. Forcing or bribing your child to eat is usually not effective and may even have a negative impact on the development of good food habits.



How should I handle my child's refusal to eat a food?

Many children go through phases of liking and disliking certain foods. At times, a child may even refuse to eat to get attention.

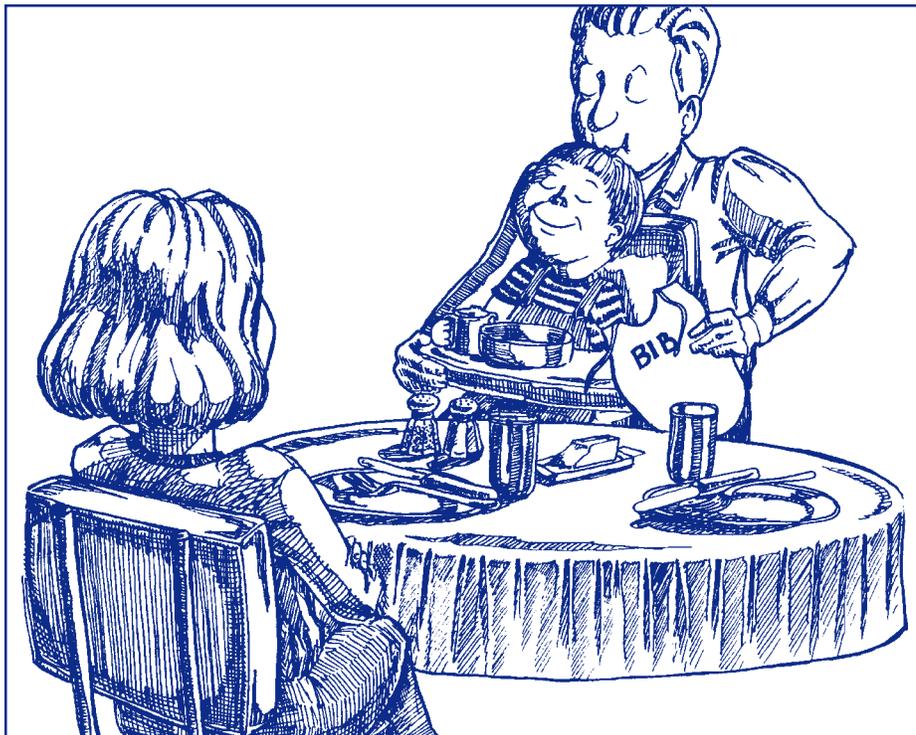
Forcing your child to eat can lead to a long-lasting dislike of that food. Try to ignore the behavior and keep serving nutritious and attractive meals. The food dislike will most likely be forgotten in time. Meanwhile, praise good eating behavior.



How can I encourage my child to eat new foods?

It's good for young children to be exposed to a wide variety of foods at an early age. Wait until your child is hungry to introduce new foods. Keep the menu simple so that there are just a few choices. Introduce only one new food at a time and serve a small amount. Set a good example by letting your child see that you eat and enjoy the food.

If your child refuses to eat the food, serve it again in a few weeks. Children's food preferences change very fast.



How can I help my child master the mechanics of eating?

Self-feeding requires skillful coordination. Children will develop these skills in their own time. You can help by watching for signs of readiness. Let your child set the pace. A 1-year-old picks up food with fingers, begins to use a spoon, and can drink from a cup with help. At ages 2 and 3, children continue to use fingers and a spoon and can handle a cup themselves. By age 4, children feed themselves without assistance. Use of the knife and fork usually begins at age 5.

Appropriate utensils will help your child develop feeding skills:

Cup: lightweight, small (6 ounce or less, easily hugged by both

hands); steady (weighted base); easy to grasp (large handle)

Flatware: child-size (short, thick handles; short fork tines; shallow spoon)

Dishes: Unbreakable, steady (wide base); appropriate shape (deep enough to prevent spills).

Does a child's diet affect behavior?

There is much interest in the potential links between what we eat and how we behave. In his book *Why Your Child is Hyperactive*, Dr. Benjamin Feingold linked artificial colors, artificial flavors, and naturally occurring salicylates with hyperactive behavior. As therapy, he recommended avoiding a wide variety of

natural and processed foods.

Unfortunately, this limited diet may not include all necessary nutrients.

Several researchers have tested Feingold's theories. They have not found links between diet and hyperactivity in their studies. However, some findings suggest that a few young children may be sensitive to certain substances in foods.

There is no proven connection between sugar in foods and hyperactive behavior of children. In fact, sugar appeared to have a calming effect in one study!

Talk about it . . .

Are you concerned about any of your child's eating habits? How have you handled these?

List three things about your child's eating behavior that make you happy (such as good appetite, liking for milk).

Identify something about your child's eating behavior that you'd like to change (such as table manners, snacking habits). What will happen if the behavior continues? How can you guide a change?

What would you do if

- Tiffany has only eaten one bite of dinner.
- Jason suddenly stops drinking milk with his meals.
- Michael refuses to eat the broccoli you've served him for the first time.
- Ashley is stuck in a peanut butter rut.
- Christopher plays with his food rather than eating it.



Lesson 3 Parents as Stage Managers and Directors

Dear Parents: *As a parent, you set the stage for good food habits and direct the child-feeding activity. The third letter in your OSU Extension Service home study course, Food for Tots, explores your role as a stage manager and director. Questions about children's eating patterns and behavior are also answered.*

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Extension foods and nutrition specialist



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You've asked us a lot of questions about feeding young children. There are no set rules. We offer these suggestions for you to adapt to your own family situation.



Is snacking bad for my child?

Most children need food between meals. Because their stomachs are small, they may not get all the necessary nutrients at mealtime. Plan on offering snacks at about the same time each day. This discourages all-day nibbling that leads to overeating and poor dental health.

Select snacks from the following: fruits and vegetables, breads and cereals, milk and milk products, meat and meat alternates. Suggestions are given in the chart below. Children under age 2 should not be given foods that might cause choking, such as carrot and hot dog slices, peanuts, grapes, hard candies, or popcorn.

Snack ideas

Fruits and vegetables

Fruit juices
Gelatin dessert (using fruit juice as half of liquid)

Fruits, canned or raw (cut into small pieces; peeled for child under 2)
apple wedges
pears
peaches
bananas
dried fruits (for child over 2)
raisins
prunes, cut up and pitted

Vegetables, raw (for child over 2)
green pepper sticks
carrot sticks, thin
turnip sticks
cucumber slices
celery sticks
cauliflower or broccoli florets

Milk and milk products

mild cheese (cubes or fingers)
milk (with vanilla or orange juice for variety)
yogurt
pudding

Meat and meat alternates

meat (cubes or strips)—soft or ground for child under 2
hard-cooked eggs (wedges or slices)
peanut butter (on crackers or stuffed into tender celery sticks, strings removed)

Breads and cereals

cookies (with significant amounts of oatmeal, peanut butter, raisins)
ready-to-eat cereals (not sugar-coated)
crackers
toast

Talk about it . . .

How could you improve your child's snacks? Consider variety and nutritive value.

Analyze the rating wheel in Lesson 2. What snacks could improve your child's nutrient intake?



How can I be sure that my child is getting enough iron?

Many young children do not have enough iron in their diets. This may affect their growth, health, and energy level.

Because few foods are excellent sources of iron, you'll need to include several iron-containing foods in your child's diet (see chart). Iron from cereals and vegetables will be better absorbed when eaten with a vitamin C source (see key nutrients chart in Lesson 2).

If you think your child needs an iron supplement, check with your doctor.

Iron Content of Foods*

Ready-to-eat food	Amount	Milligrams of iron
beans, dry, cooked	¼ cup	1.3
beef, ground, cooked	1 oz	1.0
bread, white enriched	1 slice	0.7
bread, whole wheat	1 slice	0.8
broccoli, cooked	½ cup	0.4
chicken, canned	1 oz	0.4
corn flakes, fortified	½ cup	0.3
custard, baked	½ cup	0.5
egg, medium	1	1.0
liver, beef	1 oz	2.5
macaroni, cooked	½ cup	0.7
oatmeal, cooked	½ cup	0.7
peanut butter	1 Tbsp	0.3
pork, cooked	1 oz	0.9
raisins	1 Tbsp	0.2
spinach, cooked	½ cup	1.3
tuna, canned	1 oz	0.4
watermelon, diced	½ cup	0.1

*Children aged 1 to 6 need 10 milligrams of iron daily.

Talk about it . . .

What iron-rich foods are part of your family's usual diet?

Which of the iron-rich foods in the chart would your child enjoy as a snack?

How can you include more iron-rich foods in family meals?



Is it wise to feed my child a low-fat/low cholesterol diet?

Americans have been encouraged to reduce fat, cholesterol, sodium, and sugar in their diets. However, these guidelines may not be appropriate for all family members. Low-fat, low-cholesterol, low-calorie diets can slow the growth and development of infants and young children. Serving low-fat foods (such as skim milk) and denying snacks (which provide needed calories) may not be in the best interest of children under age 2. Moderation and variety continue to be keys to a healthy diet.

- Brushing teeth after meals and snacks.
- Visiting the dentist regularly beginning at age 2.
- Drinking fluoridated water.

Sugar is hidden in many foods. Look for words like these when you read ingredient listings on labels: sucrose, glucose, fructose, corn syrup. All of these are forms of sugar that can contribute to tooth decay. Taking the sugar bowl off the table may remove the temptation to add more sugar.



How can I encourage my child to eat vegetables?

Vegetables provide not only vitamins A and C, but other important vitamins and minerals as well. Experiment with some new ways of serving them to see what your child enjoys.

Try them raw . . . bite-sized broccoli and cauliflower make a satisfying, nutritious snack for older preschoolers. (Younger children may choke on them.) Add variety to tossed green salads with spinach and vegetables in season (such as green peppers, tomatoes, and cucumbers).

Try them cooked . . . new vegetable combinations, spices, or sauces can add interest. A sprinkling of grated cheese or sunflower seeds adds appeal (and nutritional value, too). If your family doesn't care for vegetable side dishes, add the vegetables to main dishes such as soups or stews.



How can I encourage my child to drink milk?

Children need calcium for bone growth. Milk and milk products are the best sources. If plain milk isn't your child's favorite, flavor it with fruit juice or blended fruit. The fruit can be raw, frozen, or canned (preferably in juice or light syrup).

Fresh or nonfat dry milk can be "hidden" in a variety of foods: pudding, soup, mashed potatoes, cooked cereal, casseroles, and molded gelatin salads.

Yogurt and cheese are also good calcium sources. Children enjoy bite-sized cubes of mild-flavored cheese such as American or cheddar. Yogurt is a good dip for fresh vegetables.

Frozen yogurt and ice cream provide calcium, too. They're higher in calories than some other choices, however.



How can I plan nutritious meals that will appeal to my child?

Children need a variety of breads and cereals, vegetables, fruits, milk and milk products, and meat and meat alternates (such as eggs and peanut butter). Keep color, flavor, texture, and shape in mind as you plan:

- **Color**—orange carrots, purple plums, green peas, red radishes



Should I limit the sweets in my child's diet?

The total amount of sugar in a child's diet is a concern if sweet foods or drinks take the place of nutrient-dense foods (for example, if soda pop replaces milk). But the type of sugar-containing foods and when they are eaten may have more impact on tooth decay than the amounts eaten.

Sweet foods that stick to the teeth cause the most problems, particularly if they are eaten between meals. Bacteria in the mouth feed on these sugars and produce acid which slowly dissolves the surface of the teeth.

Children's teeth can be protected by:

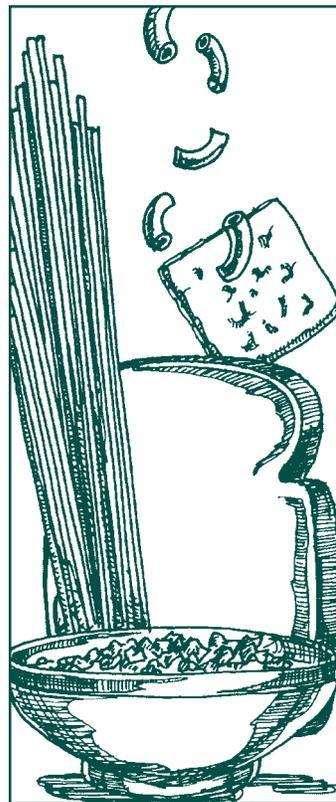
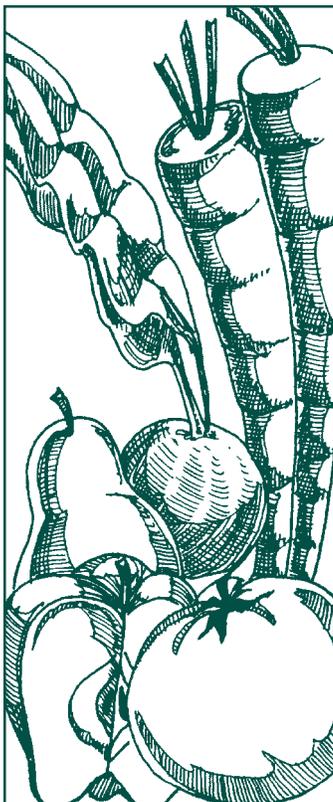
- Cutting down on high-sugar foods, especially between meals.



- **Flavor**—mild milk, sweet apple-sauce, spicy chicken coating, tart pickled beets
- **Texture**—soft mashed potatoes, crispy celery, creamy pudding,

cutter. Make pancakes into artworks by forming shapes with the batter. Hard-cooked eggs can be dyed any time of the year.

Suggest two or three food choices, rather than overwhelming your child with the whole menu. Try to include a fruit or vegetable, bread or cereal, milk or milk product, and



- chewy meat, smooth peanut butter
- **Shape**—triangular toast, cucumber strips, round peas, diced potatoes, grated carrots

For a special treat, let your child decorate ordinary foods. Make faces on hamburger buns with green olives and pimiento. Turn a pear half into an animal with raisin eyes and apple slice ears. Decorate open face sandwiches with processed cheese slice designs created with a cookie



What foods are good choices for my child when our family eats out?

Americans spend about 40 percent of their food budgets eating away from home, so it pays to choose wisely. Select a restaurant that offers familiar foods and child-size servings. Children will feel more at home if you take along their cup and tableware. Ask for a high chair or a booster seat to make your child as comfortable as possible.

meat or meat alternate. Perhaps sharing some of your own food (such as a roll or a spoonful of vegetable) would be a better choice than ordering a full serving of everything. When eating at a fast food restaurant, keep in mind that many foods such as french fries are very high in fat and salt. Salad bars often have nutritious finger foods that children enjoy. Order milk rather than soft drinks. Eat a piece of fruit when you get home instead of ordering dessert.

Questions? Answers!

Lesson 4



Dear Parents: *The final letter in your OSU Extension Service home study course, **Food for Tots**, provides answers to your questions about snacks, nutrition, and diets for children. You'll find suggestions for nutritious and healthful snack foods and ways to encourage your children to enjoy foods that are good for them. We hope that **Food for Tots** has been useful. We look forward to your continued participation in our programs.*

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