

habit. As for drinks, encourage regular full cream milk and water but limit fruit juice (not more than 200mls a day).

- Vary the place where you eat - have a "picnic" in the garden or a cubby house, for instance.
- Which foods should you limit for children's meals and snacks? Sandwich fillings like honey, jam, chocolate spread, cream-filled or chocolate biscuits, cream cakes, muesli bars, chocolate, lollies, pastries; snacks such as potato chips or corn chips. Some people think giving children lots of sweet foods is good - it shows they can afford these treats. But these foods can make children overweight and cause health problems later on. It's a common myth that just because they're young and active, children can eat a lot of sweet foods or junk foods without ill effects. This isn't true - besides causing obesity, too many of these foods leave less room for the nutritious foods which turn children into healthy adults.

Telephone numbers are correct at time of publication but are not continually updated. You may need to check the numbers in the telephone directory.

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Making Food Fun for Children and Parents

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NSW HEALTH
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Making Food fun for Children and Parents

Sitting at the table having dinner with the family is supposed to be a relaxed occasion. But if you've ever been the parent of a child under five you'll know this isn't always true. Toddlers often test "how far they can go" by refusing certain foods and demanding others. Some children play with their food, complain about it, sulk over it - do everything, in fact, except eat it. Meanwhile the parent who has prepared the meal - often at the end of a long, tiring day - is annoyed that the food isn't eaten. Parents may also worry if children don't seem to eat enough, that they don't eat vegetables or that they demand junk food.

If you have young children, here are ways to make mealtimes and food in general less of a problem:

- Don't worry if children don't eat vegetables, as long as they eat fruit each day. Refusing vegetables is a phase children often go through. But keep serving them at mealtimes even though they don't eat them - this way they learn that vegetables are part of a meal. Find ways to make vegetables appealing. Children, even at the age of three, prefer vegetables raw because they taste sweeter. If they won't eat vegetables at a meal, they may still like chewing on raw beans, snowpeas, mushrooms, capsicum, cucumber, carrot or celery while you cook. Creating patterns on a plate is another good idea (make a face with vegetable slices for eyes, nose and mouth), so is filling vegetables such as celery sticks

or button mushrooms (stalks removed) with ricotta, cottage cheese, or peanut butter. "Hide" vegetables in casseroles, or mix them in rice or pasta dishes.

- If children won't eat what you give them, don't make them - you may put them off certain foods for good. Keep offering a range of healthy food at each meal but let them decide whether or not to eat it. They won't starve - they'll eat something eventually.
- What if they refuse healthy food and demand biscuits or fatty snack foods instead? Don't give in. They might ask to play in the middle of the road too, but would you let them, just because they wanted to? Of course not. Just as playing safely is an important health issue, so is eating nutritious food. If you keep only healthy food at home, children are less likely to be tempted to eat less nutritious foods.
- Don't panic if small children eat a series of snacks throughout the day instead of three meals - after all, growing children get hungry often, but their stomachs can only hold a little food at a time. Just make sure that snacks are nutritious and varied, eg sandwiches with varied fillings, pita bread filled with chopped chicken, tomato and celery; crackers and cheese, rice cakes with mashed banana; some yoghurt or a small container of fruit salad, a small bunch of seedless grapes or some cubes of melon; wedges of hard boiled egg, feta, meat balls, leftover rice, or noodles. But even if they don't eat much at family meals, sit them at the table anyway - this helps them learn the regular mealtime