

Dinnertime: Managing Fussy Eaters

How many times have you read that dinnertime is supposed to be a wonderful occasion for togetherness and family bonding? Everyone chills out, enjoys one another's company, and shares humorous and engaging stories.

If suppertime at your house does not fit this picture, don't feel bad. You have lots and lots of company! The idea of suppertime may be a nice one, but the reality is often much different. Parents are tired from working all day and the kids are tired from school. Add a little sibling rivalry, a finicky eater (or two), and kids who don't want to sit still, and you've got a recipe for a disagreeable state of affairs.



Let's Get 4 Things Straight!

A good plan for eating together starts with a good grasp of what eating and mealtimes are all about:

1. Don't take it personally! You are not the food you prepare, so if your children don't care for what you cook up on a particular night, that should NOT be seen as a personal rejection of you.
2. Kids have a natural ability to select and eat good things. However, this includes a strong tendency in preschoolers to be finicky. As many as 50% or more of this group are described by their parents as fussy eaters. Children will gravitate to sweet and salt, but not bitter and sour. Those tastes have to be more acquired over time.
3. Because of their fussiness about food, toddlers and preschoolers need to be gradually introduced to—but not forced to eat—new foods. Some experts say that for foods like vegetables it may take as many as 15-20 exposures before a child will actually eat something like a new vegetable.
4. Little kids are not particularly good at sitting at the table, but they will do this more easily when they are hungry. When they are full, however, the Three-Minutes-Per-Year Rule kicks in. Not hungry two-year-olds, for example, can sit still for 6 minutes; not-hungry three-year-olds for 9 minutes. Expecting more will get you in trouble!

Ensure Good Appetites!

Make sure the kids are hungry when suppertime rolls around. You know your kids best, but usually it's a good idea to discontinue any kind of snacking about an hour and one half to two hours before a meal. Your children may not like this rule initially, but stick to it and pretty soon it will be simply routine.

For more ideas on how to make mealtimes more pleasant, check out our new Quick Reference Guide: *Dinnertime*.

