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“feed your kids: nourish their soul!”

by Heather L. Fraser, R.N.C.P.



One of the biggest daily challenges parents face is getting their kids to eat when, where, what and how Mom and Dad want them to eat. Of course, herein lies the problem!

Kids are not grown ups. They are free flowing balls of joy, and play, and laughter, and fun. They have little bodies. They have incredibly clear and accurate intuition. They know when and what to eat and how much, if we would only let them listen to their wisdom. If children do not want to eat, it's usually because they are not hungry, not feeling well, are too tired, or are trying to control you.

Because children are so intuitive and sensitive to emotion, they immediately sense when parents are uptight. In relation to food and eating, if mealtimes are not relaxed and open and parents are tense and controlling, then defiant and angry kids can be the expected result.

As a professional nutritional consultant, recovering perfectionist, and mother of a 4 year old, I have learned first hand how my “uptightness” around mealtime was affecting my daughter's behaviour and relationship towards food. Mealtimes were always a battleground of wills, with me inwardly fearing she would become deficient in something if she didn't eat this, or that. Thankfully I came across a quote one day in “The Baby Book”, by William Sears that said, “At mealtimes, the only responsibility a parent has is to provide nutritious, balanced food for your children. After that, it's THEIR responsibility to eat it.” This quote changed our mealtimes completely.

I finally relaxed, knowing I was doing my part in providing good food for my daughter. What she did with it after that was up to her. Because I had let go of my need to control her eating, she eventually began to trust that I trusted her ability to listen to her internal appetite meter. If she didn't want to eat, she knew it was okay. If she ate just a little, she knew it was okay.

With mealtimes relaxed, I could then communicate more openly with my daughter about her food preferences. It's amazing what you can learn from your kids when you really listen to them. I discovered that my daughter's tastes are different from mine and that it was pointless trying to convince her to eat something she didn't like. She told me she didn't like things that were “mushy”. She disliked eggs, spicy things, pears, rice, and potatoes. Her list of favourites included tuna, cashews, grapes, apples, oranges, cantaloupe, peanut butter, popcorn, fajitas, bananas, soup, crackers, carrots, lettuce with dressing, bacon, bread that's not chewy, juice, rice milk, chicken, turkey, yogurt, cheerios, cherries, sloppy joes, orange old cheese, ice cream, chocolate, and oreo cookies. Not a bad list I thought for a kid. So this is what I work with.

Sometimes my daughter asks me for tuna for breakfast. Before I open my mouth and let out all my conditioned protests that tuna is not a breakfast food, I take a deep breath and respect her healthy choice. Most of the time I am eating something different from her, but I accept that her tastes are different from mine. She's a child, and I'm a grown up. I can accept that we like different things. We can still sit down together and share a bowl of ice cream, fajitas, or a tuna sandwich and while we are eating, we joke about the things she doesn't like and the

things I don't like. She's learning about being an individual and that it is okay to be her. These are good lessons.

If you have more than one child, I'm not suggesting that you fix four different meals, but there are ways to make things a little easier at mealtimes.

- First, become a relaxed and open parent.
- Take the advice that it's your responsibility to provide good, nutritious food at mealtime. It's your child's responsibility to eat it and when they are hungry, they will if it is on their list of healthy favourites.
- Listen to and observe your kids. Notice what tastes, textures, and smells they like and it will give you a clue as to what to feed them.
- Serve meals "buffet" style and let them choose what, and how much they want.
- Joke about what they like and don't

like. Kids love parents to be silly! It eases tension and creates a relaxed atmosphere.

- Put your children's favourite foods on a shelf they can reach both in the fridge and cupboard, reserved just for them. When they want something to eat, they can get it themselves.
- Let kids help getting meals ready. They love to feel included! Forget the need to have everything perfectly arranged, chopped, or prepared. Foster their self-confidence and feed their soul.

Being a parent is the most rewarding, painful, joyful, challenging, exhausting, important job in the world. The old paradigm that children should be seen and not heard is shifting (thank goodness) as we enter this new age of conscious awareness. Our kids are being born these days with an absolute knowing and conviction that they are glorious beings and refuse to be treated

otherwise.

Those adults still stuck in the old paradigm and refusing to change with the times tend to label these spirited children for being rebellious, too sensitive, aggressive, uncontrollable, learning impaired, or suffering from attention deficit disorder, none of which is true.

These children are simply suffering from not being recognized as the beautiful gifts and teachers that they are. When a fully present, joyful adult feeds deep love, respect, healthy boundaries, allows for choices and quality time, then both adult and child become nourished and enriched from within.

Mealtimes then become an opportunity for communication and growing closer and life begins to flow with much greater ease.