



## Make Eating Mindful



One of babies' greatest assets is their ability to hear and respond to appetite cues. They cry when they are hungry, eat until they are full, and then turn from the breast or bottle when satisfied...even if there are still several ounces of milk available. One of the best ways to preserve your child's innate ability to control his food intake and to match it to his energy expenditure and growth needs is to keep eating a "mindful" act. Babies begin life with mealtime as something they focuses their entire being on. They are not watching television, playing video games, or rushing to day care or playgroup. Nestled in Moms' arms, they are thoroughly engrossed in filling their bellies with warm, rich milk. Consequently, babies "hear" when their tummy is full and stop eating.

As babies get older they are more apt to be distracted by the activity going on around them so that they can't hear or appropriately respond to internal messages. The more a child's attention is taken away from appetite and body cues, the more apt his eating is to stray from actual needs. For little children, it could mean putting them at risk for over or under eating. The following healthy hints are tools you can employ to keep your child tuned into his body's messages.

- Keep eating times relaxed so your child learns body signals for being hungry and feeling full
- Set aside time for every meal and snack. This will give your child a chance to feel full.
- Sit at the table for each meal and snack. This makes it easier to put your full focus on eating
- Before and during the meal, ask the child if he's hungry, getting full, or full. Help him to hear and respond to his body's messages.
- Avoid excessive prompting or encouragement to eat.
- Offer small portions and let your child ask for more. Then take away the food when he's stopped eating. This helps to minimize visual stimulus to eating that may not be associated with hunger.

- No TV
- No games, video or otherwise, while eating. No reading to your child while he's eating. Instead, engage in non-stressful conversation. Make the meal and the food part of the talk. Discuss the flavor, texture, color, shape, and healthfulness of the food being served and eaten.
- Separate eating from giving or receiving affection or attention. A child will often override hunger and satiety cues for either.
- Do not withhold food as a punishment. This makes hunger pains more of a punishment than a healthy bodily message for nourishment. It may also compel him to overeat even when not hungry for fear he may not be able to eat when he actually is hungry.
- Don't reward good behaviors with food. This tends to make food more 'important' or desirable than it inherently is, and may lead overeating of the 'reward' food, even when not hungry.
- Don't make your child 'clean his plate'. Forcing a child to eat when he's full, or when he's not hungry will cause him to dissociate eating from hunger and satiety cues.
- Minimize or eliminate 'eating on the run'.
- Set a good example. Your child learns how to eat by watching you.
- If you can keep mealtime atmosphere as close to the time when you held your baby in your arms for feeding, you'll help your child keep his inborn ability to eat when he's hungry, stop when he's full, and thus maintain a healthy, appropriate weight for life.

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