

# AT THE TABLE

Parents tend to worry about the eating behaviour of their children. Do they eat too much or not enough? Mealtimes are so hectic. Do they like a sufficient variety of food? We will look into the eating behaviour of children and give some tips on how to make your mealtimes as enjoyable as possible.

## EATING

Eating doesn't just mean filling up your stomach. It is so much more than that. In the beginning, a baby will be just breastfed or bottle-fed, after that there is much more to it. Your child has to learn many things to be able to eat properly. Your child needs to learn to feel hunger, to eat with a spoon, to chew, to drink from a cup, to develop his/her taste buds, ... And he/she needs to learn table manners. What is perhaps most important of all is that mealtimes should be enjoyable, a family event.

Your child's appetite will not always be the same, on the contrary, it can vary a great deal. In their first year, children tend to eat a lot. After that, they will grow more slowly and they will need less calories. This might give the impression that they don't eat enough. Most of the time, small children do not eat the same amount during the three meals of the day. Normally, they will eat a full meal only once or one and a half times a day. The older your child gets, the more your child will start eating like you.

## TIPS FOR AN ENJOYABLE MEALTIME

### 1. TEACH YOUR CHILD TO FEEL HUNGRY AND TO FEEL FULL

Your child does not have to finish his/her plate, unless he/she asks for more. By forcing your child to finish his/her plate, he/she will not learn to feel when he/she has eaten enough. A good guideline is that you decide what is on the menu and your child decides how much he/she will eat.

### 2. TRY NEW TASTES

- Let your child taste a little bit. Even though he/she might not like the new food straight away, keep offering it regularly. This way, your child can get used to the new taste.
- Offer new food together with familiar food. This way, your child will feel safe. It gives your child the opportunity to choose and to be in control.
- Encourage your child when he/she tries something that looks different, feels different and tastes different, ... and acknowledge it's ok.
- Lead by example. Your child will learn by looking at you.
- Offer many different vegetables, so, your child will start appreciating them in addition to other food.

### 3. TEACH YOUR CHILD TO ENJOY FOOD

- Let your child help with the shopping, setting the table, ... Once in a while, let your child take part in making decisions (broccoli or cauliflower tonight?) and let him/her help out.
- Present the food in a fun way. Turn something ordinary into an enjoyable occasion.
- Make sure that each meal contains at least one ingredient that your child likes and enjoys eating.

- Make sure that there is sufficient variety, so your child looks forward to certain dishes.
- Minimise the chance of a negative reaction. Don't insist if your child does not want to eat something.
- Offer small quantities and give your child a chance to want more.
- Try to grow your own vegetables or herbs and let your child help. This way, eating becomes interesting and learning fun.

#### **4. MAKE MEALTIMES ENJOYABLE**

- Eating together is always more enjoyable. You can turn breakfast or dinner into some precious family time.
- Make time for the meal and make sure your day is structured so your child knows when mealtimes are.
- Plan meals at a suitable time, to prevent stress.
- There is no need to always have 3 course menus. A pleasant and enjoyable atmosphere is more important than a sumptuous meal.
- Don't discuss problems during mealtimes; instead keep it relaxed.
- Try to have a relaxed approach to nutrition. Don't put any pressure on yourself or your child. It doesn't do any harm if your child eats less or not at all once in a while.
- Be patient with yourself and with your child. We all learn through trial and error.

#### **5. SET UP FIXED RULES**

You, as a parent, decide which rules are important for you with regard to nutrition and explain these to your child. The rules can be different for every family. Maybe the following rules will give you some inspiration.

- Announce mealtimes about ten minutes beforehand. This way, your child can finish whatever it is doing.
- Lead by example. The rules for your child also apply to you.
- Set boundaries when your child breaks the rules. Tell your child what needs to stop and what he/she needs to do instead.
- Decide whether watching T.V., playing on the computer, playing games or reading is allowed during mealtimes and then stick to your decision.
- Don't bribe your child with desserts or rewards, as this way, your child will learn emptying his/her plate is a difficult task. By giving a dessert or sweets as a reward, your child will come to think that sweets taste good and vegetables are gross.
- Don't let mealtimes last too long, for instance no longer than twenty minutes (unless your child wants to).

#### **6. IT'S OK TO BE MESSY**

Your child will learn to eat with his/her mouth, but also with his/her hands. By touching the food, your child will discover different textures. Therefore, don't try to prevent your child from being messy, but prepare yourself for it. Remember that, ultimately, the most important thing is to enjoy food and mealtimes together.

**DO YOU HAVE ANY FURTHER QUESTIONS? POP INTO A HUIS VAN HET KIND OR VISIT [WWW.KWADRAANTWERPEN.BE](http://WWW.KWADRAANTWERPEN.BE)**