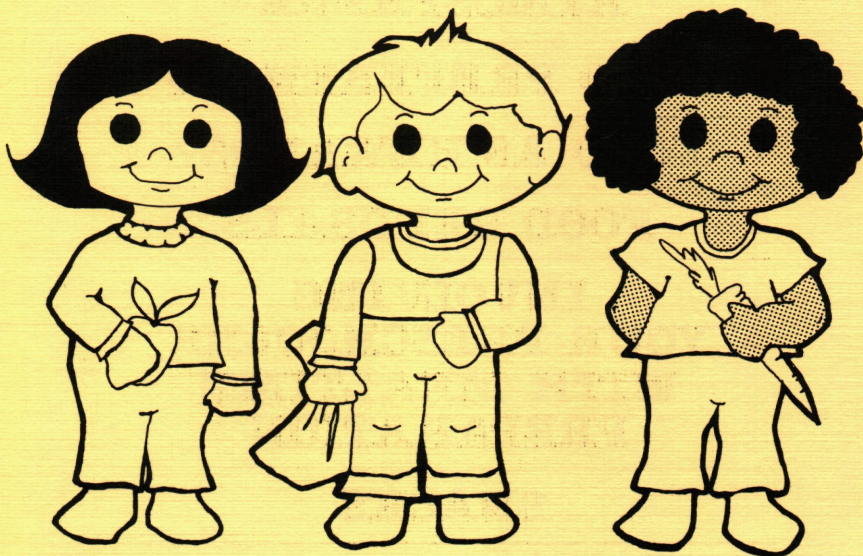


---

# FOOD FOR THE PRESCHOOLER

---

Volume II



Extension Bulletin E-1909  
Cooperative Extension Service  
Michigan State University  
August 1985 (New)

---

# HIGHLIGHTS

---

---

**FOOD HABITS**

---

**NEW FOODS**

---

**PROMOTING  
A CALM MEALTIME  
ATMOSPHERE**

---

**FOOD PREFERENCES**

---

**FOOD AS REWARDS?**

---

**FOOD REFUSALS**

---

**INVOLVING  
YOUR PRESCHOOLER  
WITH MEALTIME  
PREPARATION**

---

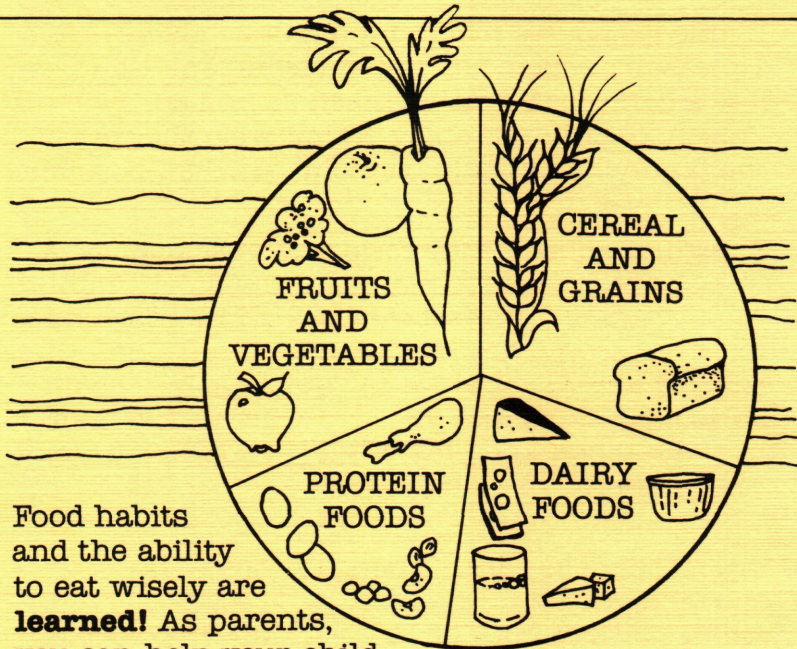
**SNACKS**

---

---

# FOOD HABITS — VARIETY IS ESSENTIAL!

---



Food habits and the ability to eat wisely are **learned!** As parents, you can help your child develop good food habits by offering a wide variety of foods (both different foods and the same food prepared different ways. For example: raw potato sticks, baked potatoes, potato salad.) Gradually introducing a wide variety of foods increases food acceptances. This is especially important during the early years when food likes and dislikes are being formed.

---

# CALM MEALTIME ATMOSPHERE

---

Hectic schedules make it difficult to always have a pleasant, relaxed eating environment. Children like a calm mealtime as much as you do.

Preschool children enjoy eating with the rest of the family and should be included when possible.

A regular schedule for meal and snack times is important for your child. Planning a 5-10 minute "quiet period" before meals will allow your child to "wind down" and then come to the table relaxed and ready to eat. A "quiet period" could be as easy as having your child sit on the floor in the kitchen and play while you do last minute preparations.

Try to serve children soon after they are seated at the table. If the meal is not quite ready, serve a **small** glass of juice or raw vegetables as an appetizer.

---

# **FOOD HABITS ARE IMITATED, NOT TAUGHT**

---

Children are great imitators and often mirror their parents' actions. Your children's food habits, likes and dislikes, frequently reflect your own! Children can learn to accept foods you dislike if you present them positively and take a few bites yourself.

---

## **NEW FOODS**

---



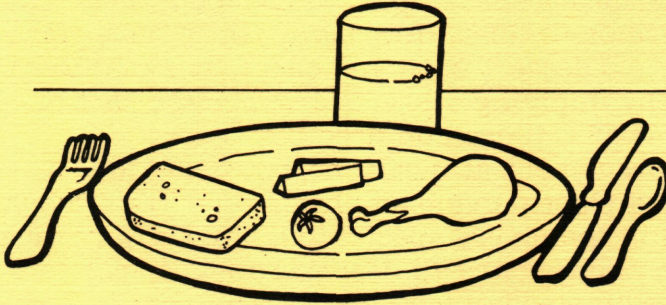
We've all experienced the frustration of having new foods rejected by our preschoolers. New foods will be accepted more readily if you follow the guidelines on the next page.

1. Introduce only one new food at a time.
2. Serve the new food with familiar foods.
3. Serve only small amounts of the new food — begin with one teaspoon.
4. Only introduce new foods when your child is hungry.
5. Talk about the new food — taste, color, texture.
6. Let your child see you eat and enjoy it!
7. Encourage your child to taste the new food. If rejected, accept the refusal and try again in a few weeks. As foods become more familiar, they are more readily accepted.
8. Find out what is not liked about the food if rejected. Often the food will be accepted if it is prepared in a different way.

---

# FOOD PREFERENCES

---



General statements about food preferences are hard to make. Nonetheless, some characteristics of food tend to appeal to young children more than others.

Preschoolers usually prefer mild-flavored and simple foods. Vegetables which develop stronger flavors during cooking (e.g., cauliflower, broccoli, cabbage) are often better accepted raw or steamed until just tender. Meats with soft textures (e.g., chicken, ground meats) are easier for young children to chew. Cutting tougher meats into small, finger-sized pieces will make them more acceptable to young children.

---

## **FOODS AS REWARDS?**

---

Sometimes we're tempted to use foods as a reward or pacifier. How many times have you said, "No dessert until you clean your plate," thereby implying desserts are a better part of the meal? Children do need positive encouragement at mealtime, but using food as a reward places undue emphasis on certain foods, making them very special to a child. Praise or a smile and hug are all desired rewards that can be used instead of food. Rather than concentrate on the dessert, why not work towards making the main dish, vegetables, and fruit more interesting!

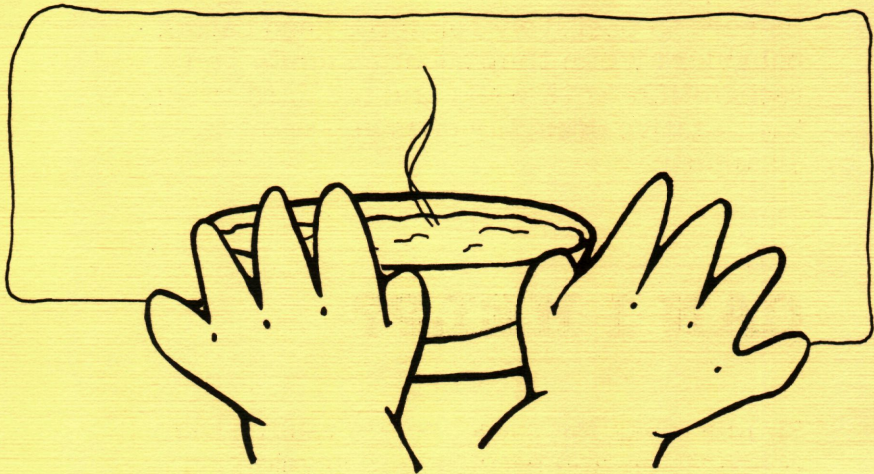
---

## **WHEN YOUR CHILD REFUSES TO EAT**

---

Preschoolers are famous for their unstable eating habits. They will often accept foods they've rejected earlier if the refusal is treated casually. Forcing a child to eat an unwanted food can result in a long-lasting dislike of the rejected food.





Children will use food to get what they want if they know refusing food upsets you. To help avoid immediate and future headaches, try to accept the refusal without coaxing. After a reasonable amount of time (25-30 minutes), remove food from the table. Then wait until your next planned mealtime to offer food.

This can be difficult for parents who are concerned about the growth and health of their children. Children's appetites lag for many reasons, most of which are very common and normal. Children know their appetites better than anyone else. Trust them.

Be sure to positively reinforce good eating behaviors when they occur (a smile and recognition work well) and try hard to ignore the negative ones, the ones you want to disappear.

---

## **CAN I HELP?**

---

Simple tasks for preschoolers related to food preparation and service help develop coordination and generate interest in eating. These contribute toward good food habits!

Suitable tasks depend on the child's muscle development. Two, three, and four year olds can place non-breakable items on the table (cups, silverware, etc.). Four and five year olds can help wash vegetables, tear lettuce, spread peanut butter on bread, and help carry food to the table.

So involve your child in mealtime preparation. Most preschoolers enjoy helping in the kitchen and readily become welcome help.

---

# **“GEE, I’M HUNGRY . . .”**

---



Since preschool children have small stomachs and small appetites, snacks are an important way of making sure your child gets the many nutrients he or she needs. Preschool children may need two or three snacks daily (your day care center probably provides two of these). Snacking should not be constant nibbling throughout the day. Serve snacks at least 1½ to 2 hours before the next meal.

Snacks should provide more than just calories. The sweet or salty foods we often think of as “snack foods” are poor choices for young children. Fruit and raw vegetables with cottage cheese dip, peanut butter toast, cheese, and gelatin made with fruit juice are all good snacks and quick to prepare.

Have nutritious snacks already prepared and easy to find (for older children who get their own snacks). Children will make good food choices when the foods you have available are nutritious ones!

### **FRUIT FLAVORED GELATIN**

1 package unflavored gelatin  
1 cup cold juice (use 100% juice)  
1 cup heated juice  
(use orange, pineapple or grape juice)  
(Sliced fruit optional)

Sprinkle unflavored gelatin on  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup cold juice to soften. Heat one cup fruit juice and add to the softened gelatin to dissolve it. Add remaining juice. Place in refrigerator until set.

Courtesy of Washington State  
Department of Social and Health  
Services, Olympia, Washington

MSU is an Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity Institution. Cooperative Extension Service programs are open to all without regard to race, color, national origin, sex, or handicap.

Issued in furtherance of cooperative extension work in agriculture and home economics, acts of May 8, and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U. S. Department of Agriculture. Gordon E. Guyer, Director, Cooperative Extension Service, Michigan State University, E. Lansing, MI 48824.

This information is for educational purposes only. Reference to commercial products or trade names does not imply endorsement by the Cooperative Extension Service or bias against those not mentioned. This bulletin becomes public property upon publication and may be reprinted verbatim as a separate or within another publication with credit to MSU. Reprinting cannot be used to endorse or advertise a commercial product or company.

1P-5M-8:85-TCM-UP (New). Price 40 cents.