

If we are what we eat then my child should be a "vegemite sandwich"!

Have you ever wondered how some children can eat from such a small selection of foods and yet somehow survive and even function? Have you felt frustrated by trying to prepare interesting meals on a daily basis with only 4 possible ingredients to work with?

Now is the time to try to increase your child's culinary repertoire in an effort to encourage healthy eating habits for life and have meal times that are positive and happy.

Outlined below are some hints on how you can encourage our child to eat more than just a "vegemite sandwich":

- Try to develop some structure with your mealtimes e.g. have set breakfast, lunch and dinner routines, where possible.
- Avoid snacking and grazing between meals, as this will reduce their appetite for meal times.
- Encourage evening meals at the table with the family, where possible. Studies have shown not only that: "families that eat together stay together", but also "families that eat together have improved nutritional health and the children develop positive social skills".
- Make meal times as pleasant an event as possible. Avoid begging, threatening or any other form of conflict during meal times.
- Although desserts are a pleasant way to complete the evening meal, they should **not** be used as a bribe to consume the less desirable vegetables first.
- Children should be encouraged to try all the food on their plate. If they don't like it after trying it, then after 20 minutes the meal should be removed without a fuss and dessert offered (if that was the intention). At the end of the meal, no other food should be

offered until the next mealtime. Children are not likely to allow themselves to starve, they just have certain food preferences (irrespective of health) and they're out to get it.

- With the risk of sounding over-simplistic, some researches have explained children's preference for foods that are high in fat and salt as having "lazy palates" or having some "addiction" to these groups of foods. These foods should be limited to "special occasion" foods only.
- Avoid watching TV or the playstation etc. during meal times.
- Keep portions "child size".
- Introduce new foods regularly and encourage them to try the food before automatically dismissing it. Then remove the plate after approximately 20 minutes as outlined above.
- Try to make foods child friendly, where possible. E.g. make bread roll sandwiches look like submarines, or toasts into soldiers or put faces on pizzas.
- Use subterfuge if necessary, to increase their vegetable intake. E.g. add grated carrots and zucchini into vegetable muffins, pancakes or potato cakes, or mix them into meatballs.
- Sprinkle a little orange juice on vegetables. Some children prefer them that way at first.
- Serve meals as an indoor or outdoor picnic for a change in setting.
- Let your child help you in the kitchen. (ensure you are not in a rush or feeling on-edge at the time!). Your child will take more interest in the food if he or she is involved in the preparation.
- Where possible, grow some fruit and vegetables of your own and get your child to help with the watering and planting.

You could try the principle of "Green Eggs and Ham" from the famous Dr Seuss Book with that title: 'Even if the food doesn't look appealing, it is worth trying and you could be pleasantly surprised'.

Above all: TRY TO AVOID FRUSTRATIONS AND MAKE MEAL TIMES AS PLEASANT AS POSSIBLE AS THEY ARE VALUABLE AND MEMORABLE TIMES OF YOUR FAMILY LIFE.

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