



Establish set times for three daily meals plus two or more snacks.



Keep serving veggies: She may need to see a food 20 times to take a bite.



Don't pressure your child to eat certain foods—it usually backfires.



Don't serve only foods she likes, or her tastes will never broaden.

# don't make these feeding mistakes

6 MONTHS–5 YEARS

Avoid these common pitfalls and help your child develop a healthy attitude toward eating.

**Raise a kid who loves salmon and salad?** Isn't afraid to try new foods? Doesn't overindulge on junk? Knows when to stop noshing in general? Yes, it is possible—but you have to know how. (Hint: It *doesn't* involve insisting that he try “just one bite” or promising dessert if he finishes his broccoli!)

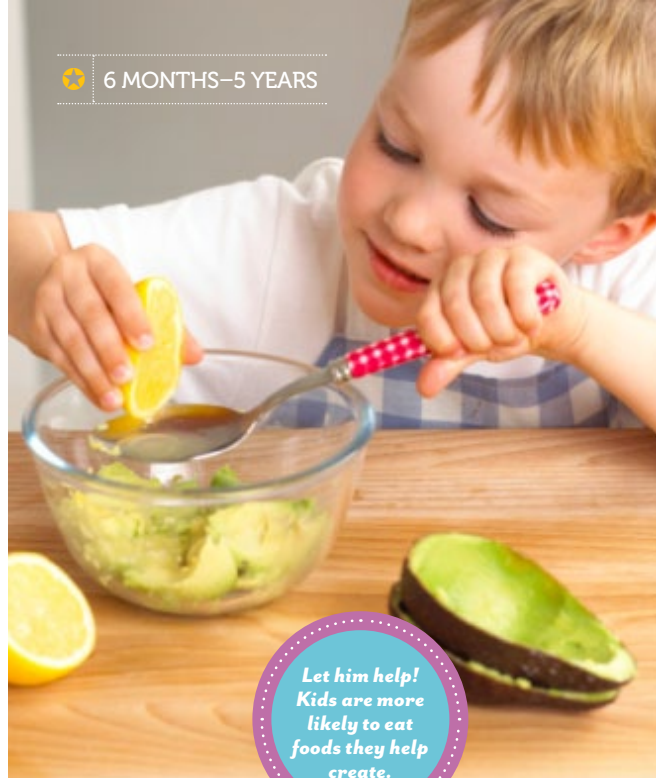
Parents can have a powerful impact on a child's lifelong eating habits and relationship to food, says Elyn Satter, RD, a registered dietitian and author of *Secrets of Feeding a Healthy Family* (Kelcy Press, 2008). Unfortunately, despite our good intentions, many of us unknowingly create problems (from extreme pickiness to weight issues and eating disorders) by interfering with our tots' eating, or not being positive or providing structure and opportunities to learn.

It can be easy for parents of toddlers to fall into bad habits. After all, mealtimes can be as stressful as navigating rush-hour traffic. You put dinner in front of your little guy only to have him refuse to take a bite or (worse!) throw it on the floor. One day he gobbles down a food; the next day he says, “Yuck!” Eat something green? Yeah, right! No wonder so many of us start doing crazy things like allowing our kids to eat PB&J at every meal or making them stay at the

table until they've chomped a Brussels sprout.

Sure, we all make mistakes. But when it comes to feeding our kids, they can have serious consequences. According to Satter, an estimated 25 to 30 percent of kids develop such bad eating problems (including consuming too much or too little food, difficulty learning the mechanics of eating and objectionable mealtime behaviors) that their parents seek professional help. And countless numbers go on to experience conflict and anxiety about eating.

To help prevent this from happening in your family, we asked a panel of experts to point out the top feeding errors—and explain what parents should be doing instead. Take their advice and your child should learn how to eat—and love—a variety of foods and stay in tune with his natural hunger cues. And with any luck, those mealtime battles should be over for good.



Let him help!  
Kids are more likely to eat foods they help create.

### MISTAKE #1: Not having regular meals and snacks

While newborns do better when fed “on demand,” toddlers need more structure, Satter says. By that, she means sitting down for three daily meals plus two or more snacks at set times—no food or drink “handouts” (except water) in between. Kids who are already in the habit of grazing may protest at first; if so, just remind your child when the next meal or snack is and stand your ground. Once she realizes that nonstop noshing isn’t an option, she can stop the constant struggle around food and focus on learning and playing, Satter points out. Plus, she’ll be able to work up an appetite, increasing the chances that she’ll eat her meal and sample new foods. Toddlers who are allowed to graze all day long without sitting down may be likely to overeat and miss out on important nutrients, adds Melinda Johnson, MS, RD, a spokesperson for the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (formerly the American Dietetic Association).

#### THE RUNNERS-UP

## Five more “don’t do it!” feeding mistakes:

#### Making dessert a reward.

Promising a treat for finishing her meal teaches her to eat even when she’s full and is likely to make her overindulge.

#### Insisting that she try a bite.

Make it a gentle suggestion instead of a stern command so she doesn’t feel forced and you both have an “out” if she digs in her heels.

#### Banning your child from the kitchen.

Kids are more apt to eat (or at least taste!) a dish that they helped create.

#### Using oversized dishes.

The bigger the bowl or plate, the greater the likelihood your tot will overeat, says food psychologist Brian Wansink, MD. Stick to kid-sized dishes for instant portion control.

#### Serving blah veggies.

Give them appeal by sprinkling them with Parmesan cheese, pairing them with a yummy dip or giving them fun names like “X-ray vision carrots” or “superhero squash.”

### MISTAKE #2: Only serving foods she likes

Limiting the menu to foods your child readily accepts almost guarantees she won’t move beyond chicken nuggets anytime soon. So don’t make her special meals! Instead, prepare one meal for the entire family, including one or two items that she ordinarily eats (such as bread and milk) along with not-yet-liked foods, says Satter. Then, put it all on the table and let your child pick and choose. Keep in mind that toddlers are naturally skeptical of the unknown and it may take 15 to 20 (or more!) exposures before she’s willing to take a bite. In the meantime, don’t worry if her dinner consists of bread. Trust that when it comes to eating habits, your child wants to “grow up” just as she does with other behaviors, Satter says.

### MISTAKE #3: Being a food pusher

Ninety percent of parents try to get their children to eat when they say they don’t want to or they’re full, Satter says. This may teach a child to ignore his body’s signals and overindulge. In one study published in the *Archives of Adolescent Medicine*, the more parents told their children to clean their plates, the more likely the kids (boys in particular) were to request oversized portions of sugary cereal at daycare. The moral: Don’t insist that your child finish his meal—or eat at all!—no matter how much you think he needs the calories or hate wasting food. To minimize leftovers, keep portions small and wait for your child to request more, advises study author Brian Wansink, PhD, a food psychologist and author of the book *Mindless Eating* (Bantam, 2006).

### MISTAKE #4: Pressuring kids to eat certain foods

If you want your child to, say, eat his spinach, the best thing you can do is back off. “The job of the parent is to get the food to the plate, not the food into the kid,” explains Johnson. “Pressure on children’s eating usually backfires,” Satter agrees. That means *no* reminders to eat or taste the food, silly eating games, nutrition lectures or threats to withhold treats. Even incentives such as cheerleading, praising and bribing are counterproductive. “As

long as you do your job of providing a variety of healthy foods, your child will do her job of eating and growing,” adds Johnson. “It might not look the way you want it to. She might refuse to eat her carrots and only eat her noodles, for example. But you’re never going to force her into being a carrot lover. Instead, keep serving them and eat them in front of her, and you may be surprised—one day, she may enjoy them!” Adds Satter: “You’re raising your child to be a good eater for a lifetime. Over her lifetime, she’s more likely to get those nutritious foods if you *don’t* pressure her to eat them.”

### MISTAKE #5: Letting mealtime get unpleasant.

Meals should be enjoyable; they won’t be if you point out your child’s every tiny indiscretion. *Do* teach her to act nicely by not throwing food or making a fuss, saying “yes, please” and “no, thank you,” and asking to be excused. But *don’t* make a big deal about eating with her fingers, not using a napkin or being a little messy. If she’s misbehaving, send her packing, even if she hasn’t eaten a morsel. She’ll quickly learn that table manners are a must.

## 6 MONTHS–5 YEARS Do-It-Themselves Guaco Taco

Having your toddler design his own taco will boost the fun and could make him more likely to try unfamiliar ingredients. If all else fails, he can enjoy a warm flour tortilla filled with shredded cheese.

Makes 6 tacos

- 6 soft flour tacos (8-inch round)
- 1 ripe avocado, peeled, pitted and diced
- 3 tablespoons minced fresh cilantro
- Juice from half a lime
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 1 15-ounce can pinto beans, drained and rinsed
- 1½ cups baby spinach leaves, rinsed and spun dry
- ¾ cup prepared mild salsa
- ¾ cup nonfat plain Greek yogurt
- ¾ cup shredded Jack cheese

Steam-heat tortillas by wrapping stack in a clean tea towel. Place towel in a steamer over 1 inch of water, cover and bring to a boil over medium-high heat. When steam appears, reduce heat to very low while you prepare rest of recipe.

Place avocado in a medium bowl and mash with a potato masher or fork. Stir in cilantro, lime juice and garlic. Season with salt and pepper and blend in beans.

Place baby spinach leaves, salsa, yogurt and cheese in separate decorative bowls.

To serve, place warm tortillas in their towel in a basket and set out ingredients so that everyone can build his or her own taco.

Don’t attempt to control how much your child eats, but for planning purposes, you can follow these serving guidelines:

**For each 6- to 9-month-old:** Puree a small amount of one or two ingredients separately, such as avocado and beans; if your baby is new to all of these ingredients, choose one. Always wait two to three days between introducing new foods. Keep serving sizes small—just a few small spoonfuls should be enough to start.



**For each 9- to 24-month-old:** Cut a prepared taco in half. Chop the tortilla and spinach into very small, easily chewable pieces, and mash up the other ingredients to avoid choking hazards. Let your child feed it to himself with a spoon or her fingers. Be sure the food is cool enough that it won’t burn his mouth.

**For each 2- to 5-year-old:** Prepare ingredients for your child to build 1 taco: 1 tortilla, 1/4 cup of guaco-bean mix and 1 tablespoon each of salsa, yogurt and cheese. Choking risk is still high among 2- to 3-year-olds, so keep an eye on tots under 4 to make sure they’re chewing and swallowing properly.

**For each adult:** Prepare ingredients for building 2 tacos, each with 1 tortilla, ¼ cup of guaco-bean mix and 2 tablespoons each of salsa, yogurt and cheese.



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leave a small portion of salmon without sauce) and broil 3 to 4 inches from heat until fish is flaky and cooked through, about 10 minutes. Remove salmon from oven, turn off broiler and lightly cover fish with aluminum foil to keep warm.

Add orzo to boiling water and cook 8 minutes. Add asparagus and cook 2 minutes more. Drain pasta and asparagus, then transfer back to pot (for a 6- to 9-month-old, set aside a small portion of pasta and a small portion of asparagus without sauce). Stir in sesame oil and soy sauce.

Serve salmon and orzo-asparagus mixture with two accompaniments your little one is familiar with, such as warm bread and a side of apple slices or natural applesauce.

Don't attempt to force your child to eat any food, but for planning purposes, you can follow these serving guidelines:

**For each 6- to 9-month-old:** Puree the sauce-free salmon, asparagus and/or orzo separately; if your baby is new to all of these ingredients, choose just one. Always wait two to three days between introducing new foods. Keep serving sizes small—just a few small spoonfuls should be enough to start.

**For each 9- to 24-month-old:** Chop a 2-ounce portion (the size of a pair of dominoes) of salmon and 1/4 cup of the asparagus-orzo mixture into very small, easily chewable pieces to prevent choking; serve ingredients separately or mash them up together. Check to make sure food isn't too hot before serving. Let your child feed herself using a spoon or her fingers.

**For each 2- to 3-year-old:** Cut off one 3-ounce portion (the size of a deck of cards) of salmon and place on plate with 1/4 to 1/3 cup of orzo mixture. Provide silverware, but don't insist that your tot use it! Choking risk is still high, so make sure she's chewing and swallowing properly.

**For each 4- to 5-year old:** Cut off a 4-ounce portion (about the size of your palm, not including fingers) of salmon and put it on a plate with 1/3 cup orzo mixture. Provide a fork and spoon, but don't make a fuss if your child still uses her fingers.

**For each adult:** Cut off a 6-ounce portion (2 decks of cards) of salmon and place it on a plate with 2/3 cup of orzo mixture.

Since writing this story, **Stacy Whitman** has started serving meals family-style and instituted a no-pressure feeding policy with her 6-year-old and 3½-year-old twins—and mealtimes have never gone better. She lives and cooks in Sun Valley, Idaho.

6 MONTHS-5 YEARS

## Maple Syrup Salmon With Sesame Asparagus Orzo

*Salmon has never been so kid-friendly thanks to a sumptuously sweet maple syrup glaze. If your child is reluctant to taste it, try telling her that eating it will give her a super brain!*

Serves 2 adults and 2 toddlers

2 tablespoons pure maple syrup  
1 tablespoon grainy mustard  
¼ teaspoon balsamic vinegar  
Salt and freshly ground black pepper  
1¼ pounds center-cut salmon fillet (about 1-inch thick)  
⅔ cup whole-wheat orzo  
¾ pound asparagus, bottoms snapped off  
1½ teaspoons toasted sesame oil  
2 teaspoons reduced-sodium soy sauce

Blend together maple syrup with grainy mustard and balsamic. Season with salt and pepper.

Adjust oven rack to highest point. Preheat broiler and line a baking sheet with aluminum foil. Place a covered medium-size pot of hot water over medium-high heat for boiling pasta.

Place salmon on prepared baking sheet. Remove pin bones from each piece with fish tweezers (or clean pliers). Spoon mustard-maple mixture over fish (for a 6- to 9-month-old,

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