

Raise your child to be competent with eating

Children are born wanting to eat, feeling good about eating, knowing how much they need to eat, and able to grow in the way that is right for them. Your child eats best, and feels best about himself, when you follow the division of responsibility and go by information coming from him to guide feeding.

| Segment | Your child's development | How to let your child eat best |
|---|--|--|
| 1. Infant | | |
| <p>0 to 3 months</p> <p>Learns to wake up and stay calm while eating</p>  | <p>At first your baby may have trouble sleeping and trouble staying awake to eat without getting upset. You can help her be calm and organized with eating and sleeping.</p> | <p>Go by your baby's cues and let her eat fast or slowly, much or little, often or infrequently. Understand and go by her sleep states, and feed her when she is calm and wide-awake.</p> |
| <p>2 to 6 mo</p> <p>Feels secure and connected during eating</p>  | <p>Your baby is learning to love and be loved. Understanding him tells him you love him. Feeling understood lets him love you back and feel good about himself. Your baby smiles, talks, and reaches out to get your attention and to keep you close.</p> | <p>Pay attention to your baby, and feed him in the way he wants. Cuddling and nursing or giving him a bottle is still the best fit with his feeding skills. Between times, talk, smile, and play with him, and respond when he talks, smiles and plays with you.</p> |
| 2. Transitional Child | | |
| <p>Remains calm and connected while learning to eat solid foods.</p>  | <p>Your baby is getting better at calming and organizing himself. He shows he is ready to learn to eat solid foods with his interest in <i>things</i>, his sitting up, and his mouth skills.</p> | <p>Wait for your baby's readiness signs, then pay attention to what he wants: whether or not, how much, how fast. He is just learning, and doesn't <i>have</i> to have the food.</p> |
| <p>Starts learning she is her own little person and learning to be part of the family with eating.</p>  | <p>She is beginning to get a sense of herself as an individual. She wants <i>very</i> much to do things for <i>herself</i>. The almost-toddler can pick up food, munch or chew it, and swallow without choking.</p> | <p>Let her feed herself. She shows she is ready, probably suddenly, by refusing to eat from the spoon. Keep in mind that finger food is anything that sticks together long enough to get it from the table to the mouth!</p> |
| 3. Toddler | | |
| <p>With eating and with all things, actively asserts his independence and learns to go along with structure and limits.</p>  | <p>Your toddler finds out that he is a separate person by being a "demon explorer" and by saying <i>no</i> a lot. Don't make his eating a battle for control; you will lose. He will go hungry rather than eat. He starts sorting out his feeling (anger, sadness) from his sensations (hunger, fullness).</p> | <p>Your toddler eats best when you do your feeding jobs and let him do his eating jobs. He needs structure. You do, too. Family meals and sit-down snacks help you sort out your feeding jobs from his eating jobs and <i>not</i> feed for emotional reasons.</p> |
| 4. Preschooler | | |
| <p>Gradually learn to eat a larger number of food in a variety of situations.</p>  | <p>Your preschooler has a solid sense of herself as an individual. That frees her up to devote her energy to <i>learning</i> and <i>doing</i>. She imitates you and wants to please you. She feels bad about herself if she can't do and be what you want.</p> | <p>Your preschooler eats more and more-consistently than earlier. Even though she seems independent, she still depends on you to do your jobs with feeding. Eat <i>with</i> her, don't just <i>feed</i> her. From now on until she is grown up, your child needs you to do your feeding jobs and support her in doing her eating jobs.</p> |

