

"When the joy goes out of eating, nutrition suffers" Ellyn Satter



# Do you have a Fussy Eater?

## A STEP BY STEP PARENTS' MANUAL FOR PEACEFUL MEALTIMES



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# IS YOUR CHILD A FUSSY EATER?

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*[ISBN and other imprint data]*

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### **Why am I writing this book?**

Since the 1970s, health authorities have been warning us about the increasing incidence of obesity and chronic health conditions such as heart disease and diabetes. As a result, there have been many attempts to ‘guide’ us about what to eat and how much to eat. Many of today’s parents, especially mothers, have grown up in an era when weight-loss dieting is the norm rather than the exception. This has led to many mothers feeling uncomfortable about eating, and sometimes not allowing themselves to eat as much as their bodies need. This may result in restricted eating, which goes against our inborn survival instinct. Unfortunately, restricted eating often leads to overeating, achieving the opposite of the desired result. Sometimes these worries carry over into parenting and feeding.

When it comes to feeding your children, many parents remember what they were taught about foods – what’s good for you and which foods to avoid. This can lead to parents feeling anxious and distressed if their child doesn’t eat the ‘good’ foods or doesn’t eat ‘enough’ of the good foods.

I am saddened that so many parents find feeding their children stressful. Whether it is the worry that the children don’t eat vegetables, or that they don’t eat enough, or that they won’t eat new foods, there is a lot of stress and concern around feeding children. Many of the parents I see in my practice are trying to ‘get their child to eat’. It may be ‘getting them to eat vegetables’, ‘getting them to eat more’, ‘getting them to eat less’ or ‘getting them to try a new food’.

I want to give you the tools and support to enjoy feeding your children, to enjoy family meals rather than seeing their preparation as a chore, or worse still, dreading mealtimes. This manual will take you through the four steps you can take to make this happen.

Each step in this manual is simple in itself; however, it will require some explanation, some change on your part and some practice with your child. Success will also depend

on being consistent. Like all aspects of parenting, consistency is the key if you want to make behavioural changes. If the rules change from day to day, your child will become confused and frustrated, and you won't achieve your goals.

This guide is written for children over one year of age. From birth to about nine or ten months, infants need to determine when they eat, and it is our job to feed them when they are hungry. Beginning at about one year of age, the parent determines the feeding routine. The information and suggestions in this book are for children whose development is within the normal range and do not have special needs.

### What are your goals?

Having bought this manual, I am assuming that you have a few goals in mind. Take a moment to write them down. This will help you keep on track and know what you are aiming for. Your goals may be about yourself as a parent, about your child's eating, about your family's mealtimes.

### My goals:

.....  
.....  
.....

**My** goals for this guide are to help you:

1. to trust your child's appetite
2. to enjoy family meals
3. to let your child have the body she/he was meant to have; and
4. to provide foods that your child needs.

### Are you ready?

In order to make changes in your behaviour that will influence your child, you need to be ready and committed. There are few circumstances that might warrant waiting a while until you start.

- Illness – your child's appetite will be affected by illness, so wait until your child is well and in his normal routine.
- Moving house – this can be a big disruption in family routine. Unpack, settle in and then tackle eating.
- A new sibling – Once your newborn has established a routine that enables you to plan mealtimes, you are ready to start; or
- A recent separation or divorce – this is a stressful time for everyone and not a good time to make big changes. However, you need to start sometime, so don't wait too long.

The recommendations and ideas in this book are based on the work and research of Ellyn Satter, an American dietitian and family therapist. In particular, the *Ellyn Satter*

Within this framework, parents provide structure, support and opportunities. Children choose how much and whether to eat from what the parents provide.

#### **The division of responsibility for infants\*:**

The parent is responsible for **what** (food).

The child is responsible for **how much** (and everything else).

The parent helps the infant to be calm and organised, and feeds smoothly, paying attention to information coming from the baby about timing, tempo, frequency and amounts.

(\* Infants are defined as from birth to around one year of age.)

#### **The division of responsibility for toddlers\*\* through to adolescents:**

The parent is responsible for **what, when, where**.

The child is responsible for **how much** and **whether** they eat.

(\*\* This age group ranges from one year to finishing school.)

I am presenting this book as a manual that outlines the steps you might take in order to reach your feeding goals. I have arranged the steps in an order that I think is the easiest to carry out. You can implement each step separately, or combine more than one step at a time.

As with parenting in general, it is important to be consistent. Once you start a step, don't stop it; rather add the next step, and then the next, and so on.

(So as to be gender-neutral in personal pronouns, I will swap between his and her, he and she throughout this manual.)

### **Step 1: Offer five or six eating opportunities at regular times each day and nothing in between.**

Eating opportunities can also be called meals. By meals I mean breakfast, morning tea, lunch, afternoon tea and dinner. Dinner can include dessert or dinner can be split into dinner and a sixth meal later called supper or bedtime snack. In my experience, younger children who go to bed earlier, do better with dinner and dessert at the one meal. For older children

At birth, your baby needs to be fed on demand, whenever she shows signs of hunger. Gradually, during the first year, your baby progresses from eating one food that provides all his nutrition (breast milk or infant formula), to eating pureed or soft foods.

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<sup>1</sup> Satter, Ellyn. *Child of Mine*

By one year, she is able to eat mainly finger foods and family foods rather than 'baby foods'. Milk has become a part of mealtimes instead of the main food.

We know that healthy babies are born knowing how much breast milk or formula they need. They let us know when they are hungry, and they stop eating when they have had enough. If we follow these cues, our infant will grow appropriately and receive the nutrition he needs. This inborn ability to regulate food intake according to hunger and satiety continues after infancy, and indeed into adulthood, if children are really left to regulate their intake.

We also know from studies of toddlers and preschoolers that each individual child eats more or less the same number of calories each day. What does differ from day to day is the amount she eats at each meal.<sup>2</sup> So a particular child may eat more at breakfast and less at morning tea one day, and less at breakfast and more at morning tea the next day. Amazingly, children know when they have had enough to eat. If we try to 'get' them to eat more or eat less than they want, we run the risk of interfering with this innate ability of knowing how much to eat. This can result in overeating or undereating, battles about the amount of food that the child wants to eat, or eating to please the parent rather than because they want to eat. Imagine if you ate a meal and felt full, but someone stood over you and said 'just three more mouthfuls' or 'if you eat some vegetables you can have dessert'. How would you feel?

### **So why five planned mealtimes each day?**

Let's start with 'why mealtimes?' Each time a child eats, the food that is eaten contributes to the daily amount of food that your child needs. If children are left to graze rather than have structured mealtimes, they may get to the afternoon and have eaten enough food for the day. Then when it is time for dinner, they are not hungry and they don't want to eat.

That's okay if they have had the chance to eat foods from a variety of foods earlier in the day. However, what usually happens is that they are offered a limited number of foods when they graze, rather than being offered mealtime foods. The few foods are likely to be foods that are convenient for parents and are easily eaten while playing, or while in the pram or in the car. They tend to be dry foods such as crackers, bread, muesli bars; fruit that is easy to eat such as banana and apple; dried fruit or cheese.

By the time dinnertime comes there is no room for meat and vegetables, which are more challenging foods than breads and cereals, or fruit and dairy foods. Meat and vegetables have stronger flavours than the other foods mentioned, and meat requires

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<sup>2</sup> Birch LL, Johnson SL, Andresen G, Peters JC, Schulte MC. [The variability of young children's energy intake. N Engl J Med.](#) 1991 Jan 24;324(4):232-5.

more effort in chewing than other foods. So dinnertime can become stressful and frustrating.

Of course, *you* want your child to eat meat and vegetables because of the important nutrients these provide. Your child is not hungry and the standoff begins. “Just try it”; “Just three mouthfuls”; “There’s no dessert if you don’t eat your dinner”. The less hungry he is, the less likely he is to eat.

Providing regular mealtimes is part of your child’s daily routine. Toddlers in particular thrive on routine. Visit any childcare centre, preschool or school, and they all have a daily timetable. It’s not for the staff; it’s so that the children feel secure in knowing what is going to happen next and that tomorrow is going to be similar to today.

Children need five or six opportunities to eat each day. They have smaller stomachs than adults, so they fill up on less food. The amount of food they can fit in usually won’t last more than two to three hours before they are hungry again. At some meals they will be hungrier than others. That’s okay.

### **Nothing in between the planned mealtimes**

The young child is really good at knowing how much to eat, no matter whether she is a large child or a small child. Your child will get hungry, eat as much as she needs to feel full and then stop eating (even in the middle of eating biscuits or a bowl of ice cream if you follow the Ellyn Satter’s Division of Responsibility). Children will ask for food in between mealtimes for a variety of reasons apart from hunger, such as to gain attention, or as a distraction, due to boredom. Usually the ‘snacks’ they ask for are foods they like and foods that are easy to eat (crackers, milk, biscuits, cheese), salty (crisps, crackers, cheese) or sweet (yoghurt, juice, fruit.) No meat and vegetables on the list!

### **So are you ready to start with Step 1? Offer five meals at regular times each day and nothing in between**

Don’t worry about what to offer at this stage. Just offer what you usually do, but offer it at five mealtimes each day. Leave 2.5 to three hours in between mealtimes so that your child gets hungry for the next meal.

Your daily mealtime routine might be something like this:

7.00am – breakfast

9.30am – morning tea

12.00pm – lunch

3.00pm – afternoon tea

6.00pm – dinner

The times are not set in stone, and may differ a bit each day, depending on what time your child wakes up; whether they sleep once or twice a day, or not at all; or if you go to an activity during the morning. However, don’t wait too long between mealtimes, so that your child is not too famished or too tired to eat.

#### EXAMPLE – MARIA AND ZOE

Maria came back to see me after we had discussed ways she could implement the 'division of responsibility in feeding'. She started offering her daughter, Zoe, three meals and two planned snacks each day. If Zoe asked for food in between these times, Maria told her that she needed to wait till the next mealtime.

This was going well and Zoe was eating more at each meal as a result. Maria's main concern was that at dinner, Zoe was only eating bread and butter and ignoring everything else on the table. She had not tried any vegetables or meat since our first appointment two weeks ago.

I explained to Maria that this is very common and that it may take months and even years before Zoe might actually eat vegetables. Zoe is a very determined child, and Maria knows that there is no point in trying to 'get her to eat' vegetables or any other food that she doesn't want to eat. Maria had tried various ways in the past to try and get Zoe to eat vegetables. She had coaxed her ('only three more peas'), bribed her ('you can't have dessert until you eat your vegies'), distracted her (sat her in front of the TV and fed her) but nothing had worked.

She was happy to try the 'division of responsibility' approach, but she was disappointed that Zoe didn't start eating vegetables straight away. Zoe needs time to experience this new way of being fed and to trust that her mother will not pressure her to eat. Maria, on the other hand, needs to trust her daughter's appetite and food choices. As with most areas of parenting, consistency and patience are important.

#### **Step 2: Let your child eat as much or as little as they want at each meal**

Go back to Ellyn Satter's *Division of Responsibility* on page 3: "The child is responsible for **how much** and **whether** they eat."

All healthy children know how much to eat. All healthy children grow in the way nature intended.

You probably know siblings who have completely different bodies from each other—that's how nature intended it to be! One has red hair, the other brown; one is tall, the other is of average height. In fact, you may not have thought they are siblings unless you were told. In my case, my two daughters are unrecognisable as sisters. One is very tall and slim, with an oval-shaped face; the other is of average height with a more solid build



and has a round-shaped face. They do have a common trait – straight hair. Neither of them inherited my very curly hair!

Each child is born with their own genetic makeup that determines traits and characteristics such as what colour eyes they have, how tall they are going to be, how much muscle and fat their bodies will have, and their growth rate.

### How do we know if a child is healthy and has a normal appetite?

The most common tool that is used by health professionals to determine the overall health of a child is their rate of growth. Healthy children have a steady growth rate. From about three months of age they track around a particular percentile band on the growth chart. And they eat as much as they need to grow.

Children who eat and grow at the upper or lower extremes of normal often make their parents (and some doctors and nurses!) worried. Parents may become so worried that they start to interfere with the **'how much'** of eating. Parents may try to restrict the large child from eating, or coax the small child to eat more. It never works. In our weight-obsessed society, parents get nervous about the large child who enjoys food. They worry that he will become fat and often start restricting the amount of food he eats.

There are subtle ways that some parents restrict food without acknowledging that that is what they are doing. Saying 'You can't be still hungry' or 'if you're still hungry eat more vegetables' are two common examples.

Children who are restricted and don't get enough to eat may become obsessed with food and tend to overeat when they get a chance. Or they might sneak or hide food to eat when they can. On the other hand, I have seen parents who are concerned that their child is 'underweight' when in fact the child is one whose weight is on a lower percentile band and yet is growing at a normal rate. This can result in parents wanting to 'get their child to eat more' than the amount they want. This doesn't work either. Younger children may not be able to say 'I've had enough to eat', so you need to go by their signs and signals. Young children might turn their head away from the spoon coming at them, push their plate away, start throwing food on the floor, or simply stop feeding themselves. If you are concerned that they don't eat enough, you may find yourself distracting your child with a toy, an iPad or the TV so you can get a few more spoons of food into them. You may 'trick' them into opening their mouth by pretending the spoon is an aeroplane or you may just get them to sit there for a while hoping that they will put a few more pieces of food in their mouth. All of these attempts give your child a clear message: *you do not trust her ability to regulate her food intake.*

So, nothing in between the planned five mealtimes, even if he asks for food, or even if you are tempted to offer food you know he will eat if he hasn't eaten what you offered at the previous mealtime.

### **Step 3: Have sit-down meals and planned snacks**

Now that you are offering food at five planned mealtimes, you need to consider where you and your family are having those meals.

In order for your child to be aware of the feelings of hunger and satiety, it is a good idea to eat each meal in a defined space. It might be in a high chair, at the kitchen bench, at the dining room table or on a blanket in the park. No matter where the meal is taking place, make sure each meal has a beginning, middle and an end. That way it is clear to your child that the meal has ended when she has had enough to eat.

If the child is eating at the same time as playing or watching TV, it will be more difficult for her to be aware of feeling full once she has had enough to eat. She may be distracted by the game, by other children, or by the TV, and forget that it is mealtime. You may be more tempted to finish the meal when you think it is time to do so, rather than when your child has told you she has finished.

On the other hand, you may be tempted to leave the food lying around for a while. This can result in your child snacking on the food over a longer period of time and ending up not being hungry for the next planned meal. It's important to remember that children don't need much time to eat the food they need if they are hungry.

As soon as he shows or tells you that he has had enough, give him the opportunity to leave the table. Make it clear that this is the end of his meal and that there won't be anything else to eat until the next meal.

Young children are busy and will get bored if they are made to sit at the table after they have finished eating. They don't need to leave the room, but they do need to let you finish eating without climbing on you or distracting you from eating. Make sure that toys they like to play with are easily accessible, so that you don't need to get up from the table, or at least not more than once!

### **Step 4: Put the food in the middle of the table, not on your child's plate**

Part of growing into a toddler is the quest for more control over one's life and more independence. As a baby, your child was totally dependent on you, the parent. You fed her when she was hungry, changed her nappy when it was wet or dirty, held her, rocked her, talked and sang to her to stimulate her senses and to bond with her.

The toddler wants to become an individual rather than remaining 'a part of you', and to gain independence slowly. Of course he is still dependent on you for most things, and will remain so for some time to come. However, it is time to start giving him more choices.

As far as feeding is concerned, this newfound independence and testing your reaction can start from one day to the next. One day he will accept most food that you put in front of him, the next he won't want any of it!

It is your job to provide the food, and his to decide **whether** and **how much** he will eat from what you make available.

So, to avoid conflict and mealtime battles, avoid putting food on his plate. That way, he can decide whether to take it or not. There's nothing to fight about. You are giving him the control as to whether he puts the food on his plate or not. You are also showing him respect in accepting his decision as to whether or not he eats what's on offer.

Even when your child puts certain foods on his plate, he may not actually eat them. This may be his way of getting closer to eating the food. He is checking it out. He may even pick it up, lick it and then put it back on his plate. It can be really hard not to make any comments at this point and you may need to actually hold your tongue. Saying any 'encouraging' words may be all it takes to put him off eating. After all, he wants control and independence.

#### EXAMPLE – PRUE AND ALEX

Prue came to see me because she was concerned about Alex, her four-year-old son. She explained that Alex eats a narrow variety of foods and that he has had low iron levels in the past. He had been prescribed an iron supplement for this by his pediatrician, which he had been taking for a while.

The main problem for Prue is at dinnertime, when Alex refuses to eat most foods she puts on his plate. The only meat and vegetables he eats are in spaghetti bolognese, for which Prue blends the sauce containing vegetables and meat. He eats cereal and milk at breakfast, crackers or a muesli bar at morning tea, a sandwich at lunch and a banana smoothie at afternoon tea.

Alex and his six-year-old sister eat dinner sometime between 5.00 and 5.30pm. Prue usually eats with her husband when he gets home from work, at about 7.30pm. On the weekend, they all sit down to eat dinner together. However, Alex often doesn't eat what is put on his plate and wants to leave the table to go and play.

After speaking to Prue, it became clear that she felt she isn't a good mother if she doesn't insist that Alex eats his dinner. This creates a lot of stress for her – she becomes annoyed with Alex and he becomes more and more defiant. The mealtime becomes stressful for everyone, including Alex's sister.

We discussed the 'division of responsibility in feeding', and that her job is to provide a variety of foods (which she is doing) and to have regular mealtimes where her children can eat as much or as little as they want. Whether Alex eats what is offered and how much he eats is entirely up to him. Prue could see that by getting annoyed with Alex, she is not

achieving what she wants and she is also putting pressure on Alex. Mealtimes had become a battlefield. Prue decided to move dinner a little later and sit and eat with the children. As long as she puts at least one food on the table that she knows Alex will eat if he is hungry, she is doing her job and can be reassured that Alex won't leave the table hungry.

### Step 5: Have family meals

The most important change you can make to improve the nutrition of your family is to eat together.

There is a lot of research<sup>1</sup> showing that children and adolescents benefit from having family meals. Some of the benefits include:

1. Healthier meals for the whole family.
2. Children are less likely to be overweight or obese.
3. Adolescents are less likely to abuse drugs, drink alcohol and have sex.
4. School grades will be better.
5. You and your children will talk more.

I hear a lot of parents saying "but my partner doesn't get home until after the children have eaten". If only one parent is at home at meal times, that's fine. A family meal can be one child and one parent, or two parents, children, grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins, roommates, friends, neighbors, or any combination of this. If you have young children, start by eating together on weekends.

A family meal doesn't need to be daunting – leave the gourmet meals for dinner parties. Eating take-away pizza together qualifies as a family meal. The goal is to get everyone to the table at the same time and follow the *division of responsibility in feeding*.

### How to get organised for family meals

1. Serve the same foods that you usually do and get everyone to sit at the table together.
2. Get the family involved with helping to wash, peel and chop fruit and vegetables, set the table.
3. Turn off the TV and DVD. This is time for talking and listening to each other. Even very young children will enjoy having your attention and will respond to a relaxed mealtime.

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<sup>2</sup>Amber J. Hammons, Barbara H. Fiese, "Is frequency of family meals related to the nutritional health of children and adolescents?" *Pediatrics* 2011 June; 127(6), e1565–e1574.

4. Use a slow cooker. You'll love coming home to a delicious smell and having dinner already cooked.
5. Use convenient foods such as canned tomatoes, lentils, chickpeas and other vegetables, or pre-prepared fresh vegetables, such as stir-fry or salad mixes where you only need to add cooked rice or a dressing.

#### EXAMPLE – LISA, JOHN AND SAM

Lisa and John consulted me about their son's eating. They were concerned that their younger son, Sam was a 'fussy' eater. When I asked whether they eat meals together, they told me that mealtimes are a nightmare and that they want to have a quiet meal after the children are in bed.

What was happening at the dinner mealtime? Lisa would serve the boys dinner at about 5.00pm. When she put the plate in front of Sam, he would start crying that he didn't want to eat, that he didn't like what was on his plate and would push the plate away. Not a good start to a meal. After further discussion it became clear that afternoon tea was being served at about 3.30pm. Lisa was giving the boys dinner at 5.00pm so that they could be bathed, have stories and be in bed by about 7.30pm. This was so that she could then cook for herself and her partner and has dinner in peace and quiet with him.

The fact was that by the time she had fed the children, cleaned up, bathed them and put them to bed she didn't really feel like cooking again. She was pretty exhausted by the time it was her dinnertime. I suggested that the boys may not be hungry at 5.00pm if they had had afternoon tea at 3:30pm.

Children need time between meals to get hungry for the next meal. Usually 2 ½ to 3 hours between meals is a good amount of time. So, dinner could be served between 6.00pm and 6.30pm. Lisa then had more time to cook dinner for all the family and she only needed to cook one meal. She and her partner could then eat with the boys and by the time they went to bed, they would have the rest of the evening to relax.

They gave it a go. The food was served in the middle of the table and the boys were given the choice of what food they wanted on their plate. Sam ate only familiar foods. The main thing that Lisa and John loved was the fact that the mealtime was pleasant and that Sam actually ate some food. The older son said how he liked eating together – what better positive reinforcement could they have received! They were still concerned that Sam hadn't tried any new foods. I reassured them that this was normal

and that it may take a long time until he did try something new.

### Are you running a restaurant or a family?

When we go to a restaurant, we get a menu and we choose what we want to order from that menu. Many parents fall into the trap of running a restaurant instead of deciding what foods to offer at each meal. Going back to the *division of responsibility*, it is your job to decide what is on the menu.

Don't ask your child, 'What do you want for breakfast/dinner/lunch?' Children don't know what they need from a nutrition point of view. If you only give them what they want, how are they going to be exposed to a variety of foods? They are likely to choose the familiar, easy foods and stick to that.

Usually parents know what foods children need. For example, a child over one year needs approximately 500ml of milk a day. If given the choice, she might ask for milk at every meal. Drinking only milk at each meal is not going to give her the nutrition she needs, teach her to chew and develop eating skills, or to get to see, touch and taste different foods. So as the parent you decide what foods are offered at each meal rather than asking your child what they want. Of course you will offer milk at some meals and not at others.

Children can also use this opportunity to test you out. You ask them what they want, they tell you, you prepare it and then they don't eat it! How frustrating. I would get angry if this happened to me several times a week.

Some parents of young (and sometimes older) children end up cooking two or three meals a night. Usually, this is because they are catering to the child's 'fussiness'. There are several reasons parents do this:

1. They think that their children won't eat what they, the adults, are eating. Often this may be true at that particular stage. But how are they ever going to eat a wider variety of foods if they are never exposed to them? It seems easier to cook something you know they will eat and then make another meal of what you want to eat.
2. One parent (usually the father) comes home later than when the children need to eat. Some mothers make the decision that they would rather eat with their partner than with the children. They end up cooking something quick for the children, and then cook what the parents prefer to eat later on.

### Cook what you want to eat

As the cook, you have the privilege of choosing the meals on the menu. The fact is that children will learn to eat the foods that you like eating. Some children will adapt to your food from the time you start offering family foods. Others may take a very long time. Each family is different and its menu is based on its culture, what the adults ate as

children, and what tastes good to them. For example, if your children like sausages and you don't, but you like steak, include sausages and steak as a meal every now and then. That way both you, and your children, have something you like to eat at that meal. However, I wouldn't be cooking sausages every night just because that is the only meat they will eat. Sausages will be on the menu just as often as a curry, stir-fry, casserole or a roast.

### **What to offer at mealtimes**

Include two to three foods at each planned snack (morning and afternoon tea). Serve four to five foods at mealtimes. Make sure protein, fat and carbohydrate are included in each meal and snack. What about milk?

#### **Protein foods:**

Beef, lamb, and pork

Chicken

Fish, tuna, smoked, fresh or canned salmon,

Seafood such as prawns, calamari/squid

Milk, yogurt, cheese, custard

Eggs

Nuts and nut butters

Legumes – baked beans, kidney beans, chickpeas, lentils, dahl, black-eye beans, cannellini, lima beans

Tofu

#### **Foods that contain fat:**

Milk, yogurt and cheese (not skim or no-fat milk and yogurt)

Avocado

Nuts and nut butters

Butter, margarine, cream cheese

Oils

Salad dressings – but not the fat-free ones

Coconut cream

Dips such as hummus, tahini, cream cheese-based dips, tzatziki and guacamole

Pastries, croissants, muffins, biscuits, cakes

Mayonnaise

#### **Grain foods – carbohydrates**

All kinds of bread

All kinds of crackers

Couscous

Pasta, noodles

Rice	Raisin/fruit bread
Quinoa	Tortillas
Barley	Wraps
Oats	Fruit buns
Pikelets	Breakfast cereal – look for ones
Pretzels	that have iron added, particularly
Popcorn	if your child doesn't eat red meat
English muffins	Crumpets

Fruits contain carbohydrate too. It's in the form of sugars, called fructose.

Most vegetables contain very little protein, fat or carbohydrate. Peas, corn, sweet potato and potato contain starch (carbohydrate), and legumes such as chickpeas, baked beans, kidney beans and soybeans also contain starch (carbohydrate) and protein. Other vegetables contain vitamins, minerals, fibre and water, but not protein, fat or carbohydrate. Fruits also provide us with vitamins, minerals, fibre and water.

### **Suggestions for morning and afternoon tea**

Crackers and cheese	Drained, canned chickpeas and cheese
Fruit and yogurt	and carrot sticks
Fruit bun and a glass of milk	Sushi and a glass of juice or milk
Raisin toast and a glass of milk	Fried rice made with leftover rice, soy
Fruit smoothie	sauce and canned or frozen peas and
Fruit and pikelets, with a spread such as	corn
butter, margarine or cream cheese	Plain or date scone with butter or
Vegetables sticks and hummus	margarine and milk
Baked beans with bread or toast	Rice cakes with Vegemite, peanut
Celery filled with peanut butter or	butter, avocado or hummus
cream cheese and crackers	Pikelets with butter and honey plus
Leftover pasta with grated cheese	yogurt
Fruit and crackers with a spread and	
milk	

### **What about cakes, biscuits, lollies, chocolate, muesli bars, potato, vegetable or rice crisps?**

There is no need to offer these foods until your child becomes aware of them. Maybe he has an older sibling, or he goes to the homes of friends who are eating some of these foods or you are eating these foods at home. Of course we all like to eat these foods at times.

When you offer any of these foods, make them part of a meal rather than having them in between mealtimes. For example, put cake out at afternoon tea with a glass of milk,



have hot chips as part of dinner every now and then, put a bowl of dessert out for everyone at dinnertime.

Yes, if you have decided that dessert is on the menu, it is not conditional on eating any other food that you have offered as part of that meal. However, desserts are not the foods for your child to fill up on, so offer an appropriate amount, e.g. a scoop of ice cream, a piece of cake. Once she has eaten this, there are no seconds of that food. There are, however, the other foods you have offered at that meal, which are available to eat if she is still hungry.

Treat the stash from birthday parties or Halloween similarly. When your child gets home, let him go through his loot and eat what he wants. Then explain that you are going to put the rest in the pantry and he can have one item each day at whichever meal he chooses, if he wants. For older children, it's appropriate to explain that they can choose one 'treat' food per day. So if they choose something other than the party food for a treat, then that's it for the day. The party food can be offered at morning or afternoon tea on another day. When you offer the party food or any other treat food at morning or afternoon tea, it is not competing with other usual mealtime foods.

### Planning the menu

So, you've decided that you are going to streamline your cooking and make one meal for the family. It's a good idea to sit down for 10 minutes a week and plan what you are going to cook for the week. Try to use vegetables and fruit that are in season, to include more salads in summer and more slow-cooked meals in winter. Make sure there is at least one food your child can eat such as bread, pasta or rice. This way, you can be reassured that your child will not leave the table hungry.

Here is an example of a week's dinner menu:

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Tuna mornay with macaroni	Stir-fried chicken and vegetables with noodles	Vegetarian tacos – refried beans, lettuce, cheese, tomato, taco shells, avocado	BBQ steak and sausages with green salad and rice	Roast chicken and roast potato, sweet potato, zucchini, and pumpkin.	Pan-fried fish with mashed potato and steamed vegetables and bread	Mushroom risotto with salad and baguettes

We are all busy and take shortcuts to be more efficient. You can use frozen, canned or fresh vegetables. Many stores have bags of mixed vegetables that are ready to stir fry, or

for use in soups or casseroles. Canned or frozen vegetables are just as nutritious as fresh produce. They can be more economical as well.

### **The beginning of the new way of feeding**

Now that you have taken on board the steps in this book, you will be looking forward to mealtimes instead of dreading them: well, most of the time anyway.

There may be times when you wonder whether they will ever eat a wider variety of foods, whether they will eat anything apart from bread or plain pasta, or you might sometimes be tempted to cook what you think they want instead of the family meal.

This is a normal part of any kind of big change. You have gone from trying to guess how much your child should eat, to trusting his appetite; from worrying about whether he is getting all the nutrients he needs to being reassured that he will eat enough.

Look back at the goals you set at the beginning and check which ones you have met and if any need tweaking.

**Step 1:** Offer five meals at regular times each day and nothing in between.

**Step 2:** Let your child eat as much or as little as they want at each meal.

**Step 3:** Have sit-down meals and planned snacks.

**Step 4:** Put the food in the middle of the table, not on your child's plate.

**Step 5:** Have family meals.

I would love to hear from you to know what worked and if there were some steps that were more difficult for you than others.