

Winter 2005 Wellness Article

Food Jags?

Fret not, new parents. It's perfectly normal for your child to launch his carrot sticks across the room.

Food jags, defined as a fear of new foods or eating only one type of food, are perfectly normal in the development of a child's independence. It may be their way of asserting control, or a simple hesitation to try something unfamiliar. Our bodies, especially at a young age, have an amazing ability to self regulate. If your child overindulges in one type of food, it's very likely that he or she will eventually make up for any neglected nutrients at another meal. Continue to offer a healthy variety of foods at appropriate times, and your children will begin to try new foods on their own.

Instilling a healthy association with food is just as important as encouraging healthy food itself. Allowing a child to cultivate his or her own preferences toward food is a necessary step, and not within their control. Being forced to eat a different type or amount of food than desired is no less uncomfortable for your child as it would be for you. If he or she doesn't eat much at one meal, it's okay. Children will eat when they're hungry.

This does not mean that parents need to cater to every twitch of a child's taste buds, or create a separate meal entirely. Simply providing new and healthy foods at snack times is enough. Many times, if your child sees you enjoying a food, he or she may follow suit. Children are very fond of imitating adult behaviors.

A funny twist on this idea is that while a child who has decided in February that she doesn't like apples, may decide in November that she loves them. Taste buds are sensitive in children, and continue to evolve. Allow time to discover your child's likes and dislikes. Other ideas include:

- Offer different shapes of the same foods
- Present foods in fun ways
- Offer small portions of several foods
- Allow the child to decide when he or she is full
- Incorporate favorite foods with new foods

Whenever possible, try to include the child in the preparation of a meal. Allow her to help with cleaning or preparation, and she will be more likely to take part in trying the food when it is served. This is a great way to create a positive association with food, as well. It allows time to talk to your children and reinforce the idea of mealtime as a family affair.

Creating a healthy association with food is a great way to ensure good eating habits later in life. So give in, and dish out another serving of pickles and cheese. It can't last forever.