Avoid Meal Time Power Struggles

A toddler does not need a huge amount of calories. He is not growing as fast as when he was a baby. He needs to eat enough good food so he will: 1.) have a normal energy level and 2.) grow normally.

Some days a toddler will be really hungry. Other days she may pick at her food and not feel like eating. This behavior is normal.

Parents should be more concerned with the toddler's *overall* eating pattern. They do not need to focus on what she eats at a specific meal. A toddler may be a good eater for only 1 meal a day and not eat well for the other meals. If she does not eat well one day, she may eat a lot the next day.

Parents should avoid getting into a *power struggle* with their toddler at meal time. They cannot force their child to swallow food. It will ruin the family meal if a parent nags, bribes or punishes a toddler who is not interested in eating.

Parents should offer their family a wide variety of foods: fruits, vegetables, milk products (cheese, yogurt), proteins (meat, fish, eggs, bean and nuts) and whole grains (bread, cereals). They should not fix their toddler a separate meal. Toddlers should be encouraged to eat what the rest of the family eats.

Parents can encourage children to eat:

- Do not feeding toddlers "junk food" when they are crying or bored.
- Serve meals at the table with no television.
- Eat together as a family as often as possible.
- Cut their food up into safe, bite size pieces.
- Show them how to use forks and spoons and to drink from a cup.
- Be patient when accidents occur, like spilling milk or dropping food on the floor.
- Do not insist that they eat all the food on their plates.

Make meal time pleasant and fun for everyone.

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