Questions from Childhood Feeding Webinar May 2013

Note: the speaker who replied to each question is listed after their answer.

Q1: What advice would you give to a parent with a child who is eating healthy snacks all day? How to move them from constant snacking to specific meals and snacks?
A: It sounds like the concern is that the child is eating “healthy” but similar kinds of foods and not eating meals? If parents are happy with the status quo, and the child is eating and enjoying a wide variety, while self-regulating and joining in with meals, it will be hard for these parents to be motivated to change. If what they are doing is working for everyone, and nutritional bases are covered, it may be fine for them. However, I believe that routine works best for most children. Start with having the child join in with family meals. If parents aren’t eating meals, they can all start together with whatever foods they are eating now. Maybe start on a weekend. Then look at the routine. After daycare or a nap may be a perfect chance to sit down and eat. Aim for every two to three hours. Then put away the food between times. The child might ask for food in between for a few days, but if meals and snacks are pleasant and filling (be sure that “healthy” doesn’t just mean fruits and veggies, but includes protein and fat), she should adapt fairly quickly. Parents can use the phrase, “We’ll eat again soon.” There is general consensus among childhood feeding experts that the schedule helps to optimize nutrition and self-regulation. –Katja

Q2: When you talk about division of responsibility and allowing the child to decide how much to eat, and they don’t want to eat much, but then they want dessert, what is your recommendation?
A: With Satter’s Trust Model, a small portion of dessert (fruit, pudding, ice-cream, cookie) is served WITH the meal, which means all the food is put out at the same time. Making children eat to earn dessert backfires and leads to overly valuing dessert, and actually liking other foods less well. It also risks teaching the child to overeat! What if that meal is one where the child has a low appetite, but he’s just forced himself to finish dinner so he can stuff in that coveted dessert? Warn parents that the child may eat dessert first, and maybe only dessert for a few days, but with time, dessert loses much of the intense appeal, and it’s magic when the parent watches a child lick a popsicle, then eat some chicken, then go back to the popsicle. If the dessert is a child-sized portion, and the other pieces of the division of responsibility are in place, this should help with both self-regulation and increasing variety. -Katja

Q3: What is your opinion on the calorie-free beverage enhancers such as Crystal Light or the liquid MIO being provided to children in place of plain water?
A: Only offer toddlers water or milk and juice in recommended amounts. Calorie-free beverage enhancers often taste sweet and toddlers may prefer the taste to regular water or milk. He or she will get used to the sweet taste and start asking for more juice, pop or other sweetened-beverage. - Mary
Q4: What do you tell parents who want to sneak vegetables into meals and snacks?
A: Proceed at your own risk!! If you get caught, that will make children even more suspicious and less likely to trust you and try new things. If you do sneak veggies or fruit into foods, also be sure to introduce the actual food so they have opportunities to see, smell and taste the flavor and texture. So if your brownies are laced with blueberries, also serve fresh, frozen, blueberry jam or yogurt, maybe have children help bake blueberry muffins or go blueberry picking… (You may need to cut larger blueberries in half to minimize choking risk.) - Katja

Q5: What do you recommend for breast fed toddlers that continue to breast feed more than eat solids at an age range of 2-3 years old?
A: My first question is generally around structure. Is there still “on demand” breast-feeding? Has the child learned skills to cope with upsets and challenges beyond the breast? Is breast-feeding filling a need for closeness for mom and the child? There are lots of factors to consider, and exploring how mom feels about it, without judgment, will be critical as this is a very personal decision in terms of when to wean. You can suggest starting with breast feeds during meal and snack times, or if mom is ready to begin weaning, save breast for snack times initially, and have the child join in with family meals. Consider offering food first, and finishing with a breast feed if desired. If the child eats a good variety and is growing well, then nutritionally he may be doing just fine, and supporting them with feeding information can help. Involving the child in food prep and helping lay the table with napkins, or having a child-sized pitcher for his milk may also help. Encouraging mom to offer water between meals and snack times can help address thirst in ways that don’t spoil appetite for meals as well. - Katja

Q6: What are some suggestions on getting a child to consume the 2-3 servings of milk when the child consistently resists?
A: Be patient and continue to offer water or milk. Also consider avoiding juice for the toddler who is refusing milk. He or she may like the taste of juice better and try to hold off till mom or dad gives in. Try a fun cup or even a straw to get the toddler to drink the milk. If he or she still refuses go ahead and add some flavoring. Last, be role model and drink milk at meals instead of ice tea or pop. - Mary

Q7: Why is it recommended that a child under age 12 months not drink cow’s milk yet?
A: The levels and types of protein in cow’s milk are not appropriate for an infant’s immature intestinal system. By the time they are 1 year old, they can digest and absorb cow’s milk proteins but until then, breastmilk or formula are better sources of protein for the immature gut. - DCC

Q8: Parents worry a lot if their child is getting enough to eat or not. So when a fussy child does not eat over several days, what can we suggest to the parents?
A: If a child eats nothing over several days while having access to a variety of foods, that is not typical picky eating, but is more extreme picky eating. This child may have other things going on, from sensory issues, to anxiety, or reacting to a history of pressure around eating. This is too big a topic to cover here, but I go into it in detail in chapter 3 and 4 of my book, Love Me, Feed Me. In the meantime, continue to provide a variety of foods, a family structure where everyone is eating and enjoying their foods, and a relaxed, stress-free environment where they are not being coerced to eat in any way. Pressure on eating backfires, and can look benign—like sticker
charts, TV rewards or even praise. Some children so intensely want to be in control or have it be their idea that pressure simply shuts down appetite. Meals and snacks should include one or two “safe” foods. Ask Mom and Dad about the feeding atmosphere and what they’ve tried to get their child to eat. Parents need to know that medical, sensory or oral-motor issues have been explored as well. Nutrition and growth needs to be closely assessed and monitored if the child truly eats a limited variety or amount. Review the webinar for more about feeding challenges that children and parents can bring into the feeding relationship. Even if growth is normal, sounds like this family needs a lot of support! -Katja

**Q9: How do you convince parents/caretakers that small portions are adequate?**
A: First off, it sounds like you are meeting resistance. Explore that. Why do they need “convincing?” A good visual reminder for parents who serve adult portions is to make a fist—this is about the size of an empty stomach. A toddler’s fist is, of course, much smaller than an adult’s, and likewise their tummies are smaller… so they will likely fill up on much smaller portions. After starting with small portions, maybe only a tablespoon at first, if the child wants more, you can give it to her. Only the child can know what amount is adequate, but starting with small servings, and giving more works well. Sometimes if the child is really hungry, or it is a favored food, she is having a growth spurt, or she has a large appetite overall, she may seem to eat a lot at times, and that is okay too. My daughter as a toddler would eat as much of her favorite turkey curry as I would! Reminding parents that trying to make children eat less or weigh less will backfire, is important as well. -Katja

**Q10: Please state your view on the baby food "pouches." They seem like a throwback to the bad old days of putting food in a bottle with milk and cutting the nipple to enlarge it.**
A: I am definitely seeing infants and toddlers getting stuck on these pouches, and I go into more detail about why I think this is happening in this blog post. Briefly, families rely on them because they are “healthy,” and they don’t have to worry about choking. Alas, I am seeing many families who worry about intake or nutrition where this is the only food the child eats at every meal and snack. The pouches give the child control, so asking about feeding if you are thinking that the pouches aren’t helping is key. A child would rather suck these down than battle over being fed by an anxious and pressuring parent. Pouch kids also often help themselves to the pouches (“At least they’re healthy!” parents might think) and graze throughout the day, so starting with structure can help. Then provide resources for feeding with the Division of Responsibility. – Katja

**Q11: Do we have permission to use the different milks chart in presentations/with clients?**
A: Yes. Please include your source information (e.g. table adapted from Mary Mullen’s slides from webinar: Early Childhood Nutrition: How to get feeding off to a positive and healthy start. http://www.healthyeating.org/Health-Wellness-Providers/Professional-Development/Webinars.aspx viewed May 23, 2013.) - DCC
Q12: What do you recommend about diluting infant’s juice with water?
A: This is a good idea, particularly if the child is drinking large amounts of juice. They do not need the concentrated sugar of calories, and in fact may be displacing other nutrient-rich food sources by filling up on juice. A young child’s juice intake should be no more than 4-6 oz per day, and this can easily be diluted with water in a 1:1 ratio. - DCC

Q13: If a parent still wants to feed their child rice milk instead of regular milk do you recommend other ways to increase protein and fat in their diet since they are missing out on those nutrients from the milk?
A: Make sure to show a parent the difference in protein, fat and other nutrient between types of milk and milk drinks. Also explain the importance of these nutrients for a toddler’s growth and development. If they are persistent suggest supplement with yogurt and cheese. You can also give a list of other foods high in protein and fat from the other food groups. Remember, toddlers tend to be fussy and inconsistent eaters and are often resistant to add extra fats to their food or try different things. We often strike a balance between milk and a variety of other foods at meals and snacks to meet their needs. - Mary

Q14: Is milk really important for a child’s diet? As opposed to eating yogurt, cheese?
A: We generally encourage milk for young children for its content of vitamin A and D, which cheese and yogurt do not always contain. However, yogurt and cheese are great ways to round out the recommended intake of 2-3 servings of milk and milk products per day… and do provide many of the other nutrients that milk has. - DCC

Q15: As far as structured eating, what if a child does not want to eat at meal time, but wants to eat 30-60 minutes later? Shouldn’t we encourage that timing self-regulation?
A: Toddlers do best with structured meal and snack times (usually three meals and 3 snacks). If they are allowed to eat when they want, they will often get into the habit of grazing all day long. You want to let your toddler get hungry so they sit and meals and set snack times and are willing to try a variety of foods. Explain that if they do not eat dinner that he or she will have to wait till snack time to eat. – Mary

Q16: All my 18 month old eats is fruit. Everything else she throws on the floor. We sit together and eat and she has no interest in any other foods. How do I get her to try other foods?
A: This is very common for a toddler. They often take a preference to one or two food groups, especially the fruit group. Continue to offer a variety of foods at meals and snacks. And try not to give extra attention or create a power struggle. The best you can do is serve as a role model and fill your plate with a variety of foods. Also try to be creative with different texture and shapes. You can also season/flavor other foods like vegetables or grains with something your child likes such as cinnamon or, juice form an orange. Be patient! Remember it often takes 10 to 15 tries to get toddlers to try a new food. - Mary