EATING & OUR EMOTIONS

We eat to provide nourishment to our bodies and help keep our heart, muscles, and bones strong.

But adults sometimes eat for other reasons even when they are not hungry. We eat while we watch a movie or go to a baseball game; when we celebrate a birthday, when we are sad, angry or bored.

Has your preschooler ever eaten lunch, then 20 minutes later said he was hungry?

Here's why:

Like adults, around the preschool years, many children start to use the word "hungry" to express feelings such as: boredom, loneliness, sadness, or other emotions they don't understand or can't name. Using food to relieve sadness or other emotions will establish the connection between food and those feelings instead of hunger. Over time, this can be increasingly difficult to undo. And it won't address the underlying reason for the sadness.

ASK QUESTIONS

If a preschooler complains of hunger, take a minute to gently ask questions to see what's really going on: "What have you been doing?" or "Would you like me to play with you for a while?" If your child quickly forgets about a snack, you'll know he or she was in search of your attention or just looking for something to do. If the hunger complaints continue, you probably have a hungry child on your hands.
HUNGER & FULLNESS

It's wise for parents and teachers to talk to children about what it means to be hungry and what it means to be full. Most of us are born with the ability to gauge our body's need for food, but over time we learn to ignore these signals, which may contribute to weight gain.

Preschoolers who truly understand when they are hungry - or full - can better regulate how much food to eat. Not surprisingly, children who don't recognize when they're full are more likely to be overweight.

LISTEN TO YOUR BODY!

*Here are some ways to encourage children’s awareness of when they're full:*

- Avoid the "clean your plate" rule. Let preschoolers know that it's okay to stop eating if they feel full. This encourages children to respond to their own body.

- If a child regularly leaves a lot of uneaten food, try serving smaller portions.

- Talk to children about how we eat more slowly as we become full. Remind them that it’s okay not to take seconds if you're no longer hungry. Say, "This is delicious, but I'm going to stop because I'm full."

REFERENCES

Adapted from Hunger and Your Preschooler


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