



Hunger and Fullness

Building tummy awareness



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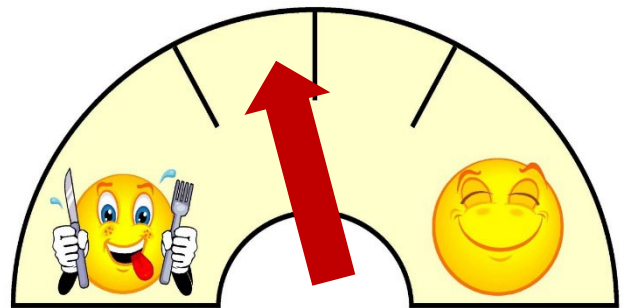


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EATING AND OUR EMOTIONS

We eat to nourish 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; or when we are sad, angry or bored.



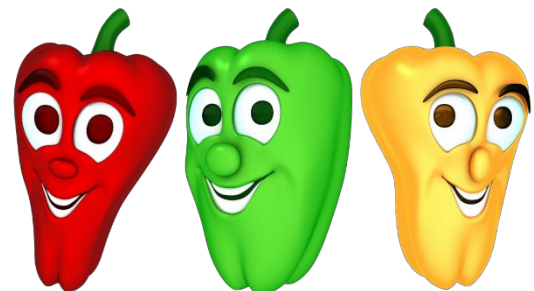
Has your child ever eaten lunch, and then 20 minutes later said "I'm hungry"?

HERE'S WHY:

Like adults, during the early 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 a connection between food and those feelings, instead of between food and hunger. Over time, this can be more difficult to undo. And, it won't address the real reason for the sadness.

ASK QUESTIONS

If a child 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 help you find something to do?" If the child quickly forgets about a snack, you'll know he or she was in search of some attention or just looking for something to do. If the hunger complaints continue, you probably have a hungry child on your hands.



HUNGER AND 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. Children who truly understand when they are hungry, or full, can better regulate how much food to eat. It's no surprise that 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 children 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 they're no longer hungry. Say,

"This is delicious, but I'm going to stop because I'm full."



*Remember that young children watch what others say and do. If teachers, parents and siblings all model **healthy eating habits**, they will have good examples to follow.*



REFERENCES

Adapted from Hunger and Your Preschooler
M. D., M. L. (2014, November). Hunger and your Preschooler. Retrieved from www.kidshealth.org: <https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/hungrypreschooler>.



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