



# How Do I Get My Child to Eat?



**COLORADO**  
Department of Public  
Health & Environment

WIC #C11(10/2014)

The answer is simple. You can't! There is no way to *make* your child eat. And the good news is it's not your job.

### Your job is to:

- Provide healthy food choices at meals and snacks
- Set regular meal and snack times
- Decide where food is served

### Your child chooses:

- What foods to eat from the choices you offer
- How much to eat
- If to eat at all

Sometimes this can seem hard to follow. Ask yourself these questions and see what applies to you and your family.

### Does your child refuse to eat certain foods?

- Your child may refuse certain foods to be independent or to get attention. Try not to make an issue of this. It may make your child more determined to refuse the food. Don't insist that your child eat everything. It's OK to have some dislikes.
- Try serving the food with other favorites or prepare the food in a

different way. Involve your child in food choices. Encourage older children to help by setting the table or by preparing the food.

- Serve at least one food you know your child likes. If he doesn't like all of the foods offered that's OK. He doesn't have to eat everything. Avoid making special foods for your child that the rest of the family is not eating.

### Does your child eat constantly throughout the day?

- Avoid letting your child "graze" throughout the day. Your child will eat little bits to keep from being hungry, but not enough to get what is needed to grow well.
- Plan to serve three meals and two snacks a day. Serve snacks halfway between meals so your child is hungry at the next meal.

### Does your child ask for the same food over and over?

- Food "jags" are common. They won't usually last long unless someone makes an issue out of them.
- Continue to offer a variety of foods at each meal. Maybe you could offer the favorite food at snack time.



### Does your child waste time while eating?

- Get rid of distractions. Turn off the TV. Leave toys for playtime.
- Offer help if it is needed. After a reasonable amount of time, take the food away and wait until the next planned meal or snack to offer food again.

### What to do when your child refuses to eat:

- React very little. Remember that your child chooses what to eat from what is offered, how much to eat and if to eat at all. Putting pressure on your child to eat

only worsens the situation and he doesn't learn to trust his own hunger signals.

- Know that it's normal for your child to sometimes refuse to eat. He may not be hungry, is tired, or doesn't feel well. He can eat at the next snack or mealtime.
- Have your child sit at the table with the family. He can leave the table when he's finished.
- It is normal for a child to want to be independent. Offer your child choices like, "Should we have spaghetti or hamburgers for supper tonight?"