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Good Food Habits for the Family

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"How to get every member of the family to eat what is placed on the table," is the major food problem faced by the South Dakota Home-maker's according to the recent homemakers survey and the discussions at the county program determination meetings. The survey and discussions indicate that the Home Extension club members, having studied food and nutrition, know fairly well what foods constitute a balanced dietary. In spite of this knowledge however, a large percent are not eating an adequate diet.

Complete Nutrition is Not a Matter of Food Alone

The following are essential nutrition factors for normal development and are needed to supplement the recommended dietary: (1) Correction of physical defects, if present. (2) Plenty of sleep and rest, sunshine and fresh air, exercise and play. (3) Meal regularity. (4) Bowel regularity (movements are regulated by diet and habit). (5) Minimum of emotional upsets—especially at meal time.

Be Alert as to Why Food is Not Eaten

Briefly summarized, factors causing members of the family not to eat what is placed on the table are as follows: (1) Physical—onset of colds or other acute infections; abnormal tonsils or adenoids; constipation; stomach and intestinal disturbances; diet may be at fault—too frequent eating (especially sweets between meals), too high in fat, too low in vitamin B, other deficiencies and irregularities; not enough outdoor play; not enough sleep; over stimulation; fatigue. (2) Mental—perverted appetite; poor parental example; low expectation; wrong suggestions; over solicitation (urging—bribing, etc.).

In dealing with the problem of getting members of the family to eat what is provided, especially the children, it is assumed that all physical factors have been eliminated and that the dietary itself is good as to selection, preparation and service.

The next step is to find the cause of Johnnie's seeming lack of appetite and whether not eating serves John a purpose, such as receiving much attention.

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E A T R I G H T — F E E L R I G H T



Adults Also Present Eating Problem

At all the county meetings it was emphatically brought out that the eating problem is not confined to the children, but to the adults as well that the attitude towards food taken by father or other adult family members is a big factor in establishing good food habits by the children.

This no doubt, can at least be partly explained by the fact that grandmother selected and prepared foods to suit the taste of grandfather and believed with most of her generation that children should speak only when spoken to, and what grandfather liked to eat was good for children. This was not due to lack of interest in the children but to lack of knowledge of child psychology and food needs for health. This has resulted in a good many fathers and mothers who were not trained in childhood to like certain foods as children are trained today. To plan meals under such circumstances which will be relished by the men of the family and which will come up to the standard set for the children is not an easy task.

How To Build Food Habits

The principles involved in forming good habits or training tastes are the same as in building any other habits. Modern psychology gives us some very definite suggestions on how to build habits. These suggestions are:

1. Practice the desired habit. Habit is built by practice or repetition and the parents' responsibility is to see that the right thing is practiced. In regard to forming food habits, it means, to repeatedly taste and eat the foods he should learn to like and include in his dietary throughout life. Repeated tasting under favorable circumstances usually develops a liking for that food.

2. In addition to practice, the practice must give satisfaction. Practice with satisfaction builds habit; practice with annoyance or dissatisfaction tears down or builds an aversion. The established food habits of an adult are based on his liking and liking is largely a matter of learning throughout childhood. The ease with which food habits are formed is influenced considerably by the pleasantness or agreeableness of the circumstances under which the tasting or eating is done. This is especially true of those under which the first tastes are experienced. Some common causes for disagreeable circumstances are, nagging, conflict of authority, emotional upsets from scolding and punishment, medicine given in food.

Often an emotional display on the part of parents in the form of anger, resentment or undue solicitude and sympathy directs the child's attention to his own importance. This gives him a sense of power which is pleasing to him. It suggests to him that at meal time is the time to get attention for himself. This is not strange when we know that a child has certain innate desires for recognition and power and that ways in which he can satisfy these strivings or desires are rather limited. It is not surprising then that a child will assert itself when a mother sets the stage in such a way that he can control her activity and reaction by not eating or by eating. Thus he can get her to bribe him, threaten him, coax him,

E A T R I G H T — F E E L R I G H T

or arouse her anger almost at will. The child may not be aware of the driving force that prompts his conduct but he is decidedly conscious of the satisfaction it gives through his sense of power.

To get real satisfaction from his food the child must be really hungry—that is have a real appetite. A regular meal schedule, with no piecing between meals, plenty of fresh air, exercise, rest and sleep stimulate the appetite.

Importance of Example in Building Food Habits

The problem of training children's tastes is made doubly hard if father, who is the son's model for everything, expresses his dislike for foods which the children should learn to like. Children are great imitators. They want to be like daddy or football playing John in what they eat as in other things. Generally speaking a good attitude toward the food with little or no comment is a most effective influence. Sometimes an expression of preference or comment on the good quality of a certain dish, if done naturally, may suggest to the child that it is worth liking. A great deal of talk about the foods quality and that it is good for you sometimes develop the tendency to be contrary. Every one concerned should take it for granted that the foods served should be eaten by every one, at least tasted. This means an unbroken repetition which is important in establishing habit.

Cooperation Of All Is Essential

In some cases it is difficult to change father's food likes and dislikes. Sometimes it is the grandmother who planned the meals to suit the taste of her husband, who supports both father and children by, such statements as, "My children ate what things they liked and got along all right. All this new stuff about foods is all nonsense." The thing to do is to talk the matter over openly and frankly and work out a plan, a sort of compromise; the mother adapting the children's menu so that it will be acceptable to the adults; they in turn agreeing not to express dislike of foods which may be on the table because of the child.

Children can be trained to accept without question the fact that they are not to expect to have their food exact duplicates of that of the adults. Avoid the first taste of foods which are not to be regularly included in the baby's or young child's diet. The child that is "simply given tastes" will soon be the child that presents a feeding problem.

Handle Wisely The First Refusal Of Any Food

Studies have shown that first refusals of food often occur with the onset of a cold or other infection, overfeeding, sudden changes in the character of the food and weaning difficulties. In such cases if the mother in her over-anxiety forces or urges the food on the child it may either develop in him an aversion toward the food and eating or he may repeat the refusal in the future because of the love of attention and excitement the situation produces. Often a legitimate refusal may develop by mismanagement into a serious psychological problem—originating in the

E A T R I G H T — F E E L R I G H T

mother's extreme desire to give the child what she feels he ought to have. Missing a meal occasionally is apt to do far more good than harm. But when a meal is missed nothing should be given between meals.

Summary Of Fundamental Suggestions To Establish Good Food Habits

1. Provide ideal conditions for habit formation
 - a. Offer small amount of food repeatedly until a liking is cultivated.
Do not be discouraged if first tastes are spit out by young children.
 - b. Make associations with eating as pleasant and as satisfying as possible.
 - c. Permit no exception to the rule of eating.
 - d. Older children and adults should set a good example.
2. Keep the child's appetite good by regularity in health routine and supply food that is worth liking.
3. A variety of flavors should be introduced early in a child's life.
If poor food habits have already been formed or the above do not bring desired results try some of the following. Those in charge of children should always remember that no two children will respond alike to the same treatment. Study the child.
 1. Provide the food in new and interesting ways, but do not talk about it.
 2. Serve very small amounts of undesired food with something that is especially liked. The fact that other members of the family find both on their plates is sufficient explanation to the wide awake observing child. He should clean his plate like the rest but with no argument.
 3. The unwelcome food can be served first and the favorite food served after the plate has been cleaned. Take this for granted as a method of procedure-with no argument or attention to eating. Serving should be small.
 4. An occasional expression of approval or praise when disliked food is eaten. Care should be taken not to overwork this however, as the child will come to expect constant praise and put an undue emphasis on a particular food.
 5. When refusal continues, remove the plate without discussion and be sure no food is given before next meal.
 6. Do not show the child you are overly concerned with his eating thereby making of meal time a showing off time for the child.

Important Food Habits To Work For

1. Regularity in eating.
2. Eating the right amount of food to take care of body needs. (Not too much or too little).
3. Eating the right kind of food to take care of body needs. This will vary with age of the child. A normal diet should include:
 - Milk, a quart for the child, at least a pint for the adult. Two vegetable a day.
 - Leafy vegetables a day (may be one of two vegetables eaten)
 - Two fruits a day.
 - A raw vegetable or fruit a day (may be one of two vegetables or one of two fruits.
 - Some whole cereal each day.
 - Protein in form of meat, eggs, fish, etc. each day.
 - At least six glasses of water a day.
4. A manner of eating and table etiquette acceptable to good society.

Questions For Study

1. What are some of the causes for children not wanting to eat?
2. What is habit?
3. To what extent does habit play a part in what and how one eats?
4. What is necessary to form a habit?
5. How can the law of practice in habit formation be applied to learning to like foods?
6. How can satisfaction be secured?
7. Why do many of the fathers and mothers of today have different food habits than the food habits we hope our children to have when grown?
8. Is teaching food habits to children through example an effective method?
9. Why is a matter-of-fact attitude in regard to foods at meal time on the part of the parents an important factor?
10. In what way can a child get more satisfaction from not eating than from eating?
11. How can the child's interest and cooperation be secured in establishing good food habits?
12. What are some of the important food habits to work for?

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