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- EATING DIFFICULTIES IN CHILDHOOD.

Feeding children right isn't always easy. Often pre-school and school age children refuse food served at home. This behavior is part of the normal development, children often use the table as a stage to show their independence, and sometimes food is not the issue at all. Besides, pre-school children are at an age in which feeding is not a priority and they are often not hungry, however physiologically they are gaining height and weight normally for their age.

There is no worry if a child skips a meal or refuses to eat his vegetables. Keep the big picture in mind. Offer a variety of healthy, tasty and nourishing foods. Plenty of food variety and a relaxed happy atmosphere at mealtime are the "ingredients" for eating right.

Remember this axiom: While parents are the best judges of what children should eat and when, children are the best judges of how much they should eat.

Problem arises when the child simply refuses to eat and begins to show weight loss and height stunting. If that is the case:

- The clinical instructions are as follows:

- a) Complete physical, tuberculin test, hemoglobin test, urine test & stool/analysis.
- b) Daily intake of multivitamin supplement to prevent nutritional deficiencies of those essential elements, which could happen because of poor eating habits.

- When medical pathology has been ruled out then the following feeding guidelines are helpful to prevent food hassles:

- a) Restrict whole milk intake to 8 ounces once daily and cheese to every other day.
- b) Work up an appetite: increase physical activity playing active games 30-60 minutes/day, for instance: dance, run, swim, skate, bike, tricycle, rope jump, etc...
- c) Restrict TV time to 1 hour/day, maximum 2 hours.
- d) Be flexible, feed your child when hungry, never mind if he skips a meal, wait until next meal to feed him right.
- e) Be realistic, serve an amount that is proportional to his age, a simple rule for each food is to serve 1 tablespoon for each year of his/her age.
- f) Schedule at least 2 mealtimes and 2 snack times per day. The snack time is an ideal moment to provide certain nutritious foods, such as vegetable soup, yogurt, ham or turkey sandwich, fruits, hard - cooked eggs.
- g) You must be patient, mealtime is not a battleground. Let the child choose what he likes and then offer him some more.

- Common food hassles:

- 1) **Food Jag:** Eats one and only one food, meal after meal.

Strategy: Food jags rarely last long enough to cause any harm. Allow the child to eat it if the "jag" food is wholesome. Offer other foods at each meal but don't remove the "jag" food, after a few days the child will likely try other foods.

- 2) **Food Strikes:** Refuses to eat what's served, this leads to "short-order cook syndrome".

Strategy: Have bread, rolls or fruit available at each meal and be supportive, set limits and don't be afraid to let the child go hungry if he or she won't eat what is served. Which is worse, an occasional missed meal or a parent who is a perpetual short-order cook?

3) **The TV Habit:** Wants to watch TV at mealtime.

Strategy: Turn off the television. Value the time spent together as a family while eating. An occasional meal with TV that the whole family can enjoy is fine.

4) **The Complainer:** whines or complains about the food served.

Strategy: First ask the child to eat other foods offered at the meal. If the child will not behave properly, have him or her go to his room or sit quietly away from the table until the meal is finished. Don't let him or her return for dessert or eat a snack until the next scheduled meal or snack time.

5) **The Great American White Food Diet:** Eats only bread, potatoes, macaroni and milk.

Strategy: Avoid pressuring the child to eat other foods because giving more attention to finicky eating habits only reinforces a child's demands to limit foods. Continue to offer a variety of different food groups, eventually the child will move on to other foods.

6) **Fear of New Foods:** Refuses to try new foods.

Strategy: Keep introducing and reinforce new foods over time. It may take many tries before a child is ready to taste a new food...and a lot of tastes before the child finally likes it. Don't force your child to try new foods.

This is the advice provided by the Committee on Nutrition from the American Academy of Pediatrics.