



# TIPS TO SUPPORT YOUR EATER IN TRAINING

Although **all children are eaters in training**, some go through stages where they find it difficult to eat certain types of food or new foods, only eat specific foods, or are easily distracted at mealtimes. This is a **normal part of development** as children explore their own independence, but can be frustrating for parents at times.

## Ideas to Support Eaters in Training

### Trust That Your Child Knows How Much to Eat

Children are born knowing how much to eat to support their bodies' needs. Just like adults, children's appetites will vary from day to day.

### Your Child's Diet is Not Just One Day

Look at the overall picture instead of tallying each day.

### Consider the Environment

Bright lights, screens, and noise can distract children. Try dimming the lights, turning off screens, and putting on calm music.

### Create Safe & No Pressure Mealtimes

Bribing, cheering and coaxing are pressure. Pressure, positive or negative, can interfere with a child's inborn ability to eat the amount that is right for them. Create a safe, emotionally comfortable environment for children to eat what they want without feeling shame, pressure or fear.

### Role Model and Eat Together

Children learn to eat by watching you. Use this time to connect with your family. This becomes more important as your child gets older and can help them build a positive relationship with food. For ideas of what to talk about try [mealtime conversation cards](#).



### Try Out the Division of Responsibility (DoR)

Satter's **DoR** divides decisions about eating into adult roles and children's roles so that children maintain their hunger and fullness cues, build lifelong eating skills, and have less stress around eating. Adults decide **what** food is served, **when** it's served, and **where** their child will eat the food. Children decide **whether** they will eat the food and **how much** they want to eat.

### Create Structure

Children thrive on routine- have meals and snacks around the same time every day. Try to reduce grazing, which can lead to mindless eating and reduce their appetite for meals and snacks.



## More Ideas to Support Eaters in Training

### Present New Foods When Your Child is Hungry

Consider offering new foods at the meal your child usually eats the most.

### Hang in for the Long Haul

Learning to eat takes time. Some children need to see a new food 20 times or more before they will try it. Steps towards eating can include smelling, licking, or touching food. Try putting a new food with a favourite food to increase acceptance.

### Create Positive Experiences That Don't Involve Eating

Get children involved with food in a non-pressurized way. This can mean painting with food, counting with food, baking & preparing food, food chores, serving others food, and putting food in the cart when grocery shopping.

### Try Preparing and Presenting Foods in Different Ways

Eg. Scrambled eggs, boiled eggs, mashed eggs, eggs mixed with other foods.  
Eg. Bread cut into strips, cut diagonal, toasted, made into a grilled cheese.

## When to get more support...

- If behaviour(s) are becoming disruptive for the family, there are growth concerns, or your child is missing entire food groups, speak to your doctor and consider a referral to a Registered Dietitian, Occupational Therapist, or Behaviour Therapist.
- It can be helpful to have a 3 day food diary to determine patterns/nutrients your child may be missing (bring this to your appointments). Avoid making comments to your child about what and how much they are eating.
- If you feel your child is not getting enough of a particular food group, a children's multivitamin may be a benefit. If your child does not eat any meat, a children's multivitamin with iron can help meet their needs. Keep in mind that vitamin tablets are a choking hazard for children under 4 years, and gummy vitamins don't usually contain iron or calcium.

## More Information

[Picky Eating | Kelty Mental Health](#)

[Solve your child's feeding problems | ellysatterinstitute.org](#)



[Helping Your 1 to 3 Year Old Child Eat Well | HealthLink BC](#)

[Feeding Toddlers and Young Children | Alberta Health Services](#)

