

The experts often tell us that in order to ensure that our little ones are instilled with the correct knowledge so that they can learn to understand food and police their own diets, we have to be rigid and sustained in the healthy products we feed them. But what are the main rules when it comes to creating your child's diet? The following points were taken from the American Academy of Paediatrics and the UK NHS guidelines on childhood nutrition, and have been specifically chosen for their relevance to parents of fussy toddlers.

Calories

Many adult diets encourage us to count calories, but with children that is not the best idea. There is a fine line between feeding a child properly, and becoming picky about the exact numbers that are passing through them. There are guidelines for calorie intake:

- + The AAP says that 1,000 calories per day is a sufficient amount for a child aged 2-4.
- + The NHS concurs, and both feel that this should be achieved through three set, well spaced-out meals everyday, and two snacks.

However, these guidelines are for healthy children only. If your child is suffering a common illness like a cold, which requires extra nutrients, or if they have a weight or vitamin deficiency, then their intake needs to be tailored specifically – health visitors will tell you how to make exact changes, well. Also, 1,000 calories is not always a realistic target.

Occasional treats are needed to create the perfect diet, and as every child is different, intake will depend on how active they are, and on their metabolism. All of these things need to be taken into account.

N.B. Some babies are naturally big before they start to crawl or walk. Give larger babies time to lose their extra weight as they become active – especially if bigger babies are in your genes! Don't worry too much, and let nature take its course. Remember that the above guidelines are for toddlers only.

Portions

Rather than counting your way to dietary success, you could try just monitoring the types of food passing through your child. The AAP recommends:

N.B. A serving equates to a tablespoon per year of age.

- + Two or three servings of either: egg, fish, meat or poultry everyday
- + Two servings of dairy product everyday (or two glasses of milk)
- + Three servings of healthy fruit and veg everyday
- + Six servings of cereal grain, potato, rice bread or pasta everyday

Look out for, and try to avoid refined sugar. This is not always easy, but it can cause tooth decay and attribute to weight gain. You'll find this in chocolate, sweets and other products that are best left for special treats and occasions.

Taking all of the above into consideration and balancing both monitoring techniques is probably the best way to go. You must remember though: children are growing and changing everyday, and even though these guidelines are very important, they are only a good place to start, nothing more.

Respect the organic nature of the feeding process, and remember:

- + Encouraging your child to try new foods will instill not only food confidence in them, but an overall confidence which will never fade.

- + If you have a picky toddler, it's very likely they were a hungry baby. If this was the case, all that your child is doing whenever they develop a fad, or change their food intake, is experimenting with the world of food. The majority of picky toddlers have no real in-depth psychological problem – they merely want to discover more about something in their lives that they feel very comfortable with.

- + Baby see baby do. Eat healthily as a family and you will raise healthy eaters.

- + Sitting as a family to eat will not only encouraged your little one to focus on what they are eating (instead of the TV) it will give you all an excuse to be part of babies development and encourage them to develop table manners, and talk.

- + Butter, salt and sugar are all addictive. If you set an addiction to rich, unhealthy foods rolling in childhood, it will snowball, and will be part of your child forever.

- + Food is fun. Be experimental and playful, and your child will develop a much sought after taste for cooking for their whole lives, and will have many a fond memory of what they were fed as a child.

If you're looking for ways to promote an active lifestyle for your baby or toddler, then how about visiting www.busylittleones.co.uk.

For books on healthy eating for your baby and toddler then visit www.smileybaby.co.uk.

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