

Food for Thought

Can children be in charge of their eating habits?

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Most mothers have this tale of woe to share with all and sundry: They spend a lot of time thinking, planning and cooking nutritious meals and placing it in front of the child, only to see the child screw up his nose, and look the other way. Finally, the only item he gladly eats is Maggi noodles, and Lays chips, they moan.

Did you know that it is not always the taste of food that causes the child to push the plate away?

WHY THE CHILD ADOPTS A NEGATIVE ATTITUDE TOWARDS FOOD

Distracting the child: Picture this scenario. The mother or the caregiver wants to finish feeding the child. There are other chores waiting for her. She takes the child to the balcony to show him the outside world - the cars, the vendors, the crows, the moon and the stars. No sooner does the child part her lips in wonder, the ball of food is stuffed into her mouth.

Bribing: The child is fed by being bribed with a chocolate or permission to watch TV at the end of the meal, getting her used to a compulsory treat.

Praising: The child is praised overtly after a meal, which makes her think that she must eat to make mother happy.

Threaten: The last resort would be a threat to tell Appa or, 'the boo-boo man will come if you do not finish your food'.

Rigidity about meal times and food quantity: The child is forced to have his meal at the dotted hour, despite him snacking fifteen minutes earlier. He is made to eat pre-defined quantities of whatever is served.

Negative remarks about the child's eating habits: Children get upset when family members say, 'she is such a fussy eater', 'she is so thin', and 'he likes only junk food' thus worsening

the situation. The dining room becomes a battleground, a reverse tug of war between the parent and child. The parent pushes the plate towards the child, the plate is pushed right back to the parent and a battle of wills ensues.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THE CHILD IS FORCED TO EAT?

Yes, a parent has only good intentions when it comes to feeding the child, but then, pressurizing them to eat can have adverse effects on the child.

Force-feeding leads to eating disorders. When the child has no control over his eating habits, he will not learn to be in tune with his body's needs. He will not recognize hunger, or how much food he requires and when to stop eating. This could lead to eating disorders in the future.

