

Three Tips for Feeding Kids during COVID-19

Many of our routines and structures have been turned upside down. The one thing that continues to be essential is that we still need to eat! By seeking ways to connect with food and take the pressure off ourselves and our kids, we create opportunities to reduce stress and nurture healthy eating.

To help with this, one of the experts in how we eat and feed, Ellyn Satter, encourages this approach to build structure around food — [YOU provide and THEY decide](#), in which adults and kids have different jobs:



Adult provides	Child decides
What food to offer	Whether to eat
When to offer food	How much to eat
Where to offer food	Grow as nature intended

Perhaps there's something in here you'd like to try. If not, that's OK too. We all need different things to help us cope.

#1 YOU provide the routine structure of sit down meals and snacks

Aiming to provide food at regular times can help children feel safe and secure by providing some structure during these changing times. We can [support healthy eating](#) for ourselves and kids when we build a predictable routine of regular meals and snacks even without a daycare, preschool, or school routine.

Creating structure isn't always easy and it can take time to figure out what is best for your family. It may help to have more planned snacks than usual right now. The key is to keep timing relatively consistent. If this is something new, consider finding ways to make it special. Homemade paper placemats may not last long but can be a great activity for kids. What to do in between breakfast, lunch, dinner, and planned snacks? Offer kids the choice of water or waiting until the next meal or snack.

#2 THEY decide whether and how much to eat from what you offer

Allowing children to decide [whether and how much to eat of the foods offered](#) can support positive, lower stress mealtimes, and in the long run, build healthier eaters. Including foods that our kids will usually eat at meals and snacks can help them feel confident that they can fill themselves up and ward off hunger later. They could still have a say in the menu before it gets on the table. You don't have to take their request but who knows, they may provide some inspiration!

#3 All foods can fit

All foods can fit into a healthy pattern of eating. And that becomes especially important when feeding kids during COVID-19, as [anxiety and stress are elevated](#). If you enjoy cookies and other sweets, [it's OK to include them](#) in the rotation of foods offered to kids too. When we provide children with some access to sweets, alongside other foods, it takes away the power, and provides them with the opportunity to learn to include them in moderation in the long run. As long as we're providing a variety of foods, from what is available right now, we've done our job well.



Consider including meals that offer “build your own” options such as a [grain-bowl buffet](#) at dinner or an [oatmeal buffet](#) at breakfast. Tacos and pizza are other options where children can learn to enjoy a greater variety of foods through a diversity of toppings or fillings. Kids generally [get what they need](#) over time to grow as nature intended. Once you've got it on the table, YOU have provided, and now THEY decide whether and how much to eat from the foods that are offered.

The bottom Line

Go easy on yourself. As parents and caregivers, you are doing the best that you can in these uncertain times. What works for one person may be different for someone else. Getting food on the table is only one part of the picture. Look for ways to build connection and enjoyment to help cope with stress. During this time of social distancing, we wish everyone health and pleasure with eating today and in the long run.

More information about food and eating during COVID-19:

- Refer to [Top Five Questions about Food and Eating](#) for more information about food safety, meal planning, and using food for comfort during COVID-19.
- If you have any specific questions about your child's nutrition, can contact HealthLinkBC at 8-1-1 to speak to a registered dietitian or [email a HealthLinkBC dietitian](#).

Supportive COVID-19 Family Resources:

- [BCPA psychological support for stress and anxiety during COVID-19](#)
- [Caring for Children in COVID-19 crisis](#)
- [Kelty's Key: online therapy for age 16+](#)
- [Foundry BC mental health support](#) for BC youth age 12-24 and their families