

Let's Eat Out! Making Meals Pleasant

Eating out may be just what you need after a hectic day! And it can be fun for your whole family. A restaurant meal is also your chance to teach your child how to act with others away from home.

You control what happens when you eat out – more than you may think!

What do you do if your child gets fussy in a restaurant?

- Excuse yourselves from the table. Take a short walk.
- Talk in a calm, quiet, and positive way. This isn't the place for loud discipline.
- Avoid forcing your child to eat. Instead have the meal packed to take home.
- Ask if the restaurant has a placemat to color or draw on. Think ahead. Bring your own – just in case.
- Bring along a stuffed animal to “share” the fun



Pick a restaurant that welcomes kids.

You may feel more comfortable. Your child will, too! Ask for the children's menu and a booster seat if your child needs to sit higher.

Eat out at your family's regular time. It's normal for young children to get fussy when mealtime is delayed. If you must eat later, a small snack helps.

Ask about food preparation – before ordering. Most kids like simple foods. Ask for sauce on the side. Most restaurants can make a hamburger, cheese sandwich, or something else that's simple. You don't need to depend on French fries!

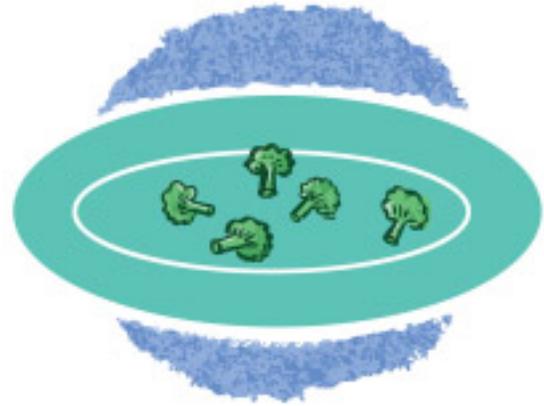
Suggest familiar foods – especially if your child doesn't eat out often. One new experience at a time is enough. Offer tastes of new foods from your plate.

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Let your child decide. Learning to choose develops independence. Select two or three foods from the menu to pick from. Your child may want to give the order. If so, support, but don't pressure, your child. If he or she suddenly gets shy, place the order.

Ask for a child-size portion – from the regular menu. Side dishes and appetizers are small, too.

Split an order – if the regular portion is big. Share the meal on two plates with your child. Or ask ahead if the kitchen can serve part of the portion on a small plate. Take the rest home.



Offer a small piece of bread after you order. A piece of raw vegetable works, too. It's hard for a hungry child to wait.

Involve your child in table talk. That takes away the boredom of waiting for food. This is your chance to talk without the interruptions at home.

Enjoy eating – but keep mealtime short. A child needs enough time to eat. But sitting patiently for a long time in a restaurant is too much to expect. Save long, leisurely meals for adults.