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Raising happy eaters

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By

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**Registered Dietitian, Christina Iaboni, shares some strategies to help parents make mealtime a more pleasant experience.**

Many of us were raised to clean our plates. We were told to finish our meal before we were allowed to have dessert. Or perhaps there were negotiations: “eat at least two bites of cauliflower and three bites of meat before leaving the table.” These comments and behaviors lead children to become out of tune with their natural hunger and fullness cues to get something they want (dessert, tv etc.) or to please a parent or caregiver.



How can parents navigate these situations to make mealtimes more pleasant for everyone?

The Division of Responsibility is a feeding theory developed by registered dietitian Ellyn Satter. This theory acknowledges children’s natural hunger and food regulating capabilities and gives parents the

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responsibility to create a supportive eating environment. There is no force feeding, negotiating or coercion tactics. It can be used for children of all ages – from infants to teenagers. The goal is to create eating competence, which means being positive, comfortable, and flexible with eating, as well as being matter of fact and reliable about getting enough enjoyable food to eat.

### **How does the Division of Responsibility work?**

Our job as parents is to decide what food is served, when and where. We choose and prepare the food, provide regular meals and sit-down snacks, plus do our best to eat meals as a family.

The job of the child is to decide whether to eat and how much. Yes, this requires trust on the parent's part to allow their child to eat what their body needs.

### **How do snacks work?**

Snacks should be thought of small meals for young children and not just treats. Children, especially toddlers and preschoolers, have small stomachs and need to eat every 3 to 4 hours. At snack time, include two to three foods which consist of some protein, carbohydrates, and fat. For example: Pure Flavor® [Poco Bites® Cocktail Cucumbers](#), cubed cheese, and whole grain crackers; Pure Flavor® [Aurora Bites Mini Sweet Peppers](#), hummus, and whole wheat pita; or Pure Flavor® [Sangria® Medley Tomatoes](#), mozzarella cheese and blueberries.



Offering vegetables as snacks, as well as at mealtime, provides more opportunities for exposure. Vegetables provide antioxidants, vitamins, minerals, and fiber that growing children need. Aurora Bites Mini Sweet Peppers, for example, are high in Vitamin C, an antioxidant that helps protect our

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cells against damage, while [Juno Bites® Red Grape Tomatoes](#) contain potassium, a mineral important for heart health.

Time snacks so that there is a long enough period before the next meal (1 to 2 hours) to allow the child to get hungry again. In between snacks, only offer water. If your child comes to you in 10 minutes after a meal and says, “I’m hungry,” simply reply saying “It isn’t snack time right now, but we have a snack at...” If your child is used to nibbling or grazing throughout the day, this can be a big change, but in time they will get used to it and learn to eat what they need at feeding times.

Raising a competent eater can take time, but the Division of Responsibility feeding method benefits both kids and parents. It takes the pressure off meals for everyone and allows children to listen to their bodies and be in tune with their hunger and fullness signals. Do your best to eat meals together as a family and prepare food you enjoy – in time, your children will enjoy all the same foods you do.

*This article is brought to you by [Pure Flavor®](#) and [Christina Jaboni](#).*

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