

By Copley News Service

Scaled-back portions can help parents sidestep mealttime battles with finicky tykes.

"Children who are poor eaters can be overwhelmed by adult-size portions," said Dr. Karen Cullen, a behavioral nutrition researcher at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston. Smaller portions also allow for positive mealttime interactions when toddlers ask for more.

According to Cullen, a good rule of thumb is one tablespoon of vegetables, fruit or meat per year of life for children less than 6 years of age.

She also advises parents to adopt a "big picture" attitude.

"It's what a child eats over several days, not at a single meal, that's important," Cullen said.

Allowing young children to listen to their bodies' hunger cues could also help them avoid overeating and weight problems later.

For children who are routinely not hungry at mealttime, Cullen suggests keeping an eye on snacks. Too much fruit juice or snacks too close to meals can ruin small appetites. Also, consider limiting beverages to one-half cup at the beginning of meals, serving more once a child begins eating.

When children who refuse to eat at mealttime complain of hunger an hour later, parents are advised to hold their ground and avoid becoming short-order cooks.

"Offer some fruit or vegetables with dip, but avoid preparing a meal. The child won't starve, and limits need to be learned," Cullen said.

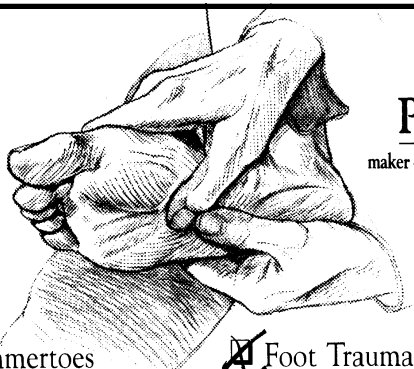
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