



Recognizing Hunger & Fullness

A Guide for Parents

Why It's Important

- Children and babies know what it feels like to be hungry and full.
- Learning to understand your infant and toddler's cues teaches them to eat when they're hungry and stop when they're full.
- You play a huge role in guiding what, when, and how your child eats.

Role as Parents and Caregivers

- You can choose the types of foods offered, the amounts served and how often you serve certain foods. This will help guide what foods your child likes.
- You decide when and where food is served.
- Keep offering many types of foods, even if your child doesn't eat them. Your child decides what and how much to eat.

Your Child's Hunger and Fullness Cues

- Your child is able to understand hunger and fullness. Your job is to teach your child to pay attention.
- Your child's hunger and fullness will change over time.
- Teaching children to pay attention to their body teaches them to trust their appetite, even when they are older.
- Crying by itself is not always a sign of hunger. Look for additional happy sounds that your child is hungry.

Find out more about a **Stress Free Mealtime** [here](#).

You provide, they decide!



Common Hunger and Fullness Cues

	Hunger Cues	Fullness Cues
0 – 6 months	Rooting/sucking Opening/closing mouth	Body relaxes/ falling asleep Slowing/pausing
6 -12 months	Reaches/points to food	Hands to face Looks away, distracted
12-18 months	Asking for food Moving toward food	Distracted Plays with food/ surroundings / throws food



How to Respond During Mealtimes



- **Provide** a calm, patient, and fun meal time.



- **Respond** to signs of hunger and fullness consistently.



- Be a **role model** for healthy eating!



- **Talk and play** with your child during the meal.



- **Be patient!** It may take many times for a child to eat foods like vegetables. Keep trying!



- **Avoid distractions** (including screens) during mealtime.



- **Encourage** but do not force your child to eat.



- **Be mindful** of the amounts you provide.



- Ask your **medical provider** for advice if you feel you are having “difficult” mealtimes.



- **What works** for one child may not work for another. Have fun learning what your child needs.



Picky Eating Tips:

Things to Avoid....	Try this instead....
Force feeding/overeating.	Watch for your child’s fullness (e.g. pulling away, falling asleep, getting distracted).
Forcing your child to “clean the plate.”	Provide amounts that are age appropriate. Allow your child to leave food on the plate or ask for more.
Pressuring your child to eat healthy foods. This can make them want less healthy foods even more.	When trying new foods, ask them what it looks, smells, and feels like and not just what it tastes like.

Find out more about picky eating [here](#).

Ohio AAP PMP Mobile App

Search Parenting at Meal and Playtime on Apple Store or Google Play



App Highlights...

- Physician-endorsed materials for parents to access on-demand
- Resources for parents organized by age
- Text reminders sent monthly and/or for age milestones
- Easy sign-up
- Videos on feeding, play, nutrition and more

