

# Mommy, I'm Hungry!

## A Lesson on Nutrition

### Playgroup #22

#### Materials Needed

- Ask each mother in advance to bring a healthy snack recipe to share with the other mothers
- Paper or 3x5 note cards and pen for each parent in attendance

#### Handouts

- The Gerber Feeding Plan
- Food Guide Pyramid
- ABC's of Good Nutrition

#### Introduction

Nutrition is a major part of your child's development. Many fail to realize that nutrition is not only related to physical health, but is directly related to how the brain develops. It is important for parents to realize that their child's nutrition and eating habits are also directly related to their own personal nutrition and eating habits.

Give each parent a piece of paper and pen. Have them write down everything they ate yesterday, including beverages, from the time they woke until they went to sleep. Pass out copies of the current USDA approved Food Guide Pyramid. Have each parent analyze exactly what they ate and how well it fits into the pyramid. Reiterate the fact that the way we as parents eat, directly affects the health habits of our children.

#### Lesson Plan

##### Lesson Objectives

- Have a basic understand of the importance of good nutrition
- Know when and how to start feeding solid foods
- Know how to deal with picky eaters

#### Understanding the Importance of Nutrition

As a parent, you are responsible for providing and teaching good nutrition to your child. Good nutrition is especially important at this young age. Your child is growing quickly; they need good nutrition in order to grow healthy and strong. Good nutrition not only impacts us physically, it also has a major impact on us mentally and emotionally. Starting healthy eating habits at a young age is also important because it affects how they will eat for the remainder of their lives. This is another reason why it is important to make nutrition a positive experience for your child. As you learn and implement good eating habits, remember that it will take time for them to be learned; it will take lots of practice and patients but over time eating nutritiously will become a habit.

Food provides the energy and nutrients a baby or toddler needs to be healthy. For a baby, breast milk has all the necessary vitamins and minerals. Infant formulas imitate breast milk but nothing is better than the mother's milk. Understanding the basics of nutrition will help you in providing proper nutrition for you and your baby.

Children differ in their needs for food and their feelings about it. Some are hearty eaters, while others are picky. Some children always eat big meals; others eat small amounts often throughout the day. It is common for a child's appetite to vary from one meal or one day to the next. How fast your child is growing, how active she is, and her general health all affect how much she will eat. Given the chance, most children do a good job of eating the food they need. Just remember healthy eating habits don't just happen. They are learned over time and take practice and patience.

### Starting Solids

Starting your child on solid foods is an exciting time for both you and them. It is a time when babies can explore, learn, and discover new flavors and textures. It is also a great time to learn how to interact. Parents are often concerned in knowing when to start feeding solid foods to their child. The American Academy of Pediatrics suggests that your baby will be ready to begin eating solid foods between four and six months of age. It is extremely important that you *wait until your baby is ready* before you start feeding solid foods. Younger babies do not have enough control over their mouth muscles or tongue. Introducing solid foods too early may also lead to problems such as food allergies, upset stomach, and obesity. It is best to wait until your child is at least four months and shows signs of readiness. Use the checklist below as a guide; if your baby is doing most of these things you are probably ready to start solid foods.

### **Is My Baby Ready for Solids? Checklist**

- My baby can sit with support
- My baby can put their hands together
- My baby puts toys in his mouth
- My baby has control of his/her head and can refuse food
- My baby can take food from a spoon and learn to swallow
- My baby is at least four months old and has doubled birth weight
- My baby is getting enough breast milk or formula, but is still hungry after feedings
- My baby wants to breastfeed more than eight to ten times during a 24 hour period or wants to drink more than 32 oz. of formula
- My baby acts interested in the foods I am eating

### Dealing with Picky Eaters

All children go through a "Picky Eater" phase, some last longer than others, but all go through it. It is important for parents to realize that all children have different likes and dislikes. Know that your child will never starve themselves; they will eat when they are hungry. Children are very good at regulating the amount of food they need so let them decide how much to eat and NEVER FORCE them to eat.

By the age of two years, the responsibilities of the "feeder" and the "eater" should begin to be established. As the feeder, you are responsible for **WHEN** your child eats and **WHAT** your child eats. As the eater, your child is responsible for **WHETHER** they eat and **HOW MUCH** they eat. If these responsibilities are understood, it will eliminate many future battles.

Keep the following in mind when dealing with Picky Eaters:

Keep their preferences in mind and offer at least one thing you know they like at the meal.

- When introducing new foods to your child, don't give up on it if your child doesn't like it the first time. Studies have shown that new foods need to be introduced 10-15 times before a child considers them familiar and is likely to eat them.

Does the child play with their food?

- This usually suggests that they are full or uninterested. As a parent you should expect messes as a child learns to eat; learning what foods are and how to feed yourself is a messy job.

Is the child too busy to eat?

- When children are busy they have difficulty concentrating on their meal. Establishing a mealtime routine and behavioral expectations will help a great deal with this. Warn and prepare children ahead of time that mealtime is approaching. Try engaging children in calming activities prior to mealtime to ensure they are focused and ready to eat.

Are they just trying to express their independence?

- Children are always looking for ways to express their independence and individuality. Avoid power struggles by offering choices that you approve of. Ex: "Would you like apples or oranges for snack?" Children LOVE to be offered choices, so give them as often as possible.

Is the child begging for foods not offered?

- Set limits about begging for things. Say "We will be eating what is offered; I know there are things here you like and can eat." If this is not done the child will get used to you making what they want when they want it, you are not a short order cook. Set limits about commenting on their dislikes and teach children to say "No, thank you."

Children will be more interested in eating when they are involved in mealtime jobs. Be adventurous, and **let your child help** when they are ready. Children who are 2 and 3 years old can help you with these jobs and many others:

- Help clear dishes from the table, especially their own (but be careful about breakable or heavy items)
- Wipe tables and countertops
- Wash fruits and vegetables
- Place garbage in the trash
- Mix ingredients together
- Open packages

Be sure you always supervise your child in these jobs, and make sure that any dangerous items are out of reach. Choose tasks that match your child's abilities, and show them what to do when they are learning. Make clean-up a part of the job. Studies have also shown that

children who help grow a garden are also more willing to try and more excited about food in general.

### **Activity**

Have the mothers pull out their healthy snack recopies to share with all in attendance. Write them down on a separate piece of paper or a 3X5 index card. Then get together with the kids and make this healthy fun food, **Ants on a Log**. All you need is celery, peanut butter, and raisins. The children will love it with their creative imaginations and you as the parent can love it because it is healthy too!

### **Suggested Reading**

- *The Berenstain Bears and Too Much Junk Food* by Berenstain, Stan & Jan (Random House, 1986).
- *Gregory, the Terrible Eater* by Mitchell Sharmat (Scholastic, 1980).

### **References**

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, [www.nichd.nih.gov](http://www.nichd.nih.gov)

National Institute of Health, [www.nih.gov](http://www.nih.gov)

American Academy of Pediatrics, [www.aap.org](http://www.aap.org)

Safe Kids Worldwide, [www.usa.safekids.org](http://www.usa.safekids.org)

Utah County Health Department, <http://www.co.utah.ut.us/dept/health/>

U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, <http://www.cpsc.gov>

University of Illinois Extension, <http://www.urbanext.uiuc.edu/toddlers/toddlers2.html>