



Dining Out With Children

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Going out for dinner as a family is always a tricky endeavor: where to go that is kid friendly and what to order so you are not spending a fortune on things you think they won't eat are often deterrents to exploring new foods. But having someone else cook and clean is nice. Then, what you find is the proverbial children's menu: chicken fingers, corn-dogs, cheeseburgers with a hefty side of french fries and a soda pop (or maybe some neon-colored drink in a fancy cup that the kids can take home). Sound familiar, unimaginative and unhealthy?

Here are some things to ponder so you can get the most from your dining experience. Eating out can indeed be a culinary thrill for both you and your children.

- Share an entrée or order a couple of appetizers for the children as their meal.
- Set rules about what is an acceptable beverage. Sweetened beverages are pitfalls because they fill your children up and offer little nutrition.
 - If you order soda for your children, the server might offer free refills. Don't accept!
 - If you order soda or a carbonated beverage, have it come with the meal so the children avoid filling up on empty soda calories.

– Stick to noncaffeinated soda drinks. (In my family, the only time my kids drink soda is when we go out, but they also will order milk instead if I ask them to.)

- Have the server bring all of the food together rather than the children's food first. You don't want the children to rush you when your food arrives, leading to indigestion.
- Offer your children tastes of the food you are eating, but don't entice them with bribes; rather ask them gently. Some children need several attempts at trying a food before they say outright they like it.

Dining out is a great way to socialize your children and teach them manners (saying "please" and "thank you," ordering for themselves and sitting nicely for a period of time). You can alleviate some of the before-the-food-comes fidgetiness by bringing crayons and paper, playing word games or just plain talking.

Think about introducing new foods to your children through the culinary experiences they have at an early age. Enjoying different types of foods is a learned skill gained through experience. Repeatedly exposing children to new and different types of foods helps them learn how to explore their world. So, enjoy a variety of dining experiences with your children; they surely will benefit in the long run.