Help Kids Listen to their Bodies

Even babies know when they have eaten enough. Help children keep listening to their bodies as they grow.

Kids who “listen” to their own fullness cues stop eating when they feel full and are less likely to become overweight. Give kids a chance to stop eating when they feel full, even if you think they aren’t. They’ll feel more independent and you’ll help them keep a healthy weight.

- **Let children serve themselves at each meal.** Teach them to take small amounts at first. Preschoolers can practice serving from small bowls that you hold for them. Tell them they can get more if they are still hungry.

- **Avoid praising a clean plate.** A child should stop eating when he or she is full, rather than when the plate is clean.

- **Reward or console children with attention and kind words, not food.** Show love with hugs and kisses. Console with hugs and talks.
  - Giving children sweets when they feel sad or as a special treat can teach them to eat when they are not hungry. This may cause them to ignore body signals of fullness and overeat.
  - Rewarding with sweets also lets children think sweets or desserts are better than other foods. For example, telling a child “no dessert until you finish your vegetables” may make her or him like the vegetable less and the dessert more.

- **Try not to restrict specific foods.** If that restricted food becomes available to the child, he or she might eat it despite feeling full. This can lead to a habit of overeating. Also, don’t restrict sweets or other treats as punishment for bad behavior.

- **Use positive encouraging phrases** to help children recognize when they have had enough. (For examples, see the *Phrases that Help not Hinder* handout).

Adapted from [http://www.choosemyplate.gov/](http://www.choosemyplate.gov/).