Hunger

Hunger is a physical expression of a need for food. It is different from appetite, which is more of a desire to eat a particular food than a real physical need (see the sheet “Appetite”).

Hunger signals:

- Growling stomach
- Lack of energy, fatigue or difficulty concentrating
- An empty feeling in one’s stomach
- Irritability

Hunger varies from one day to the next!

Hunger is as variable as the weather. Some factors that may affect hunger are:

- Growth (↑ growth spurts)
- Physical activity (↑)
- Meals/snacks eaten earlier (time and foods eaten), (↓ or ↑ depending on the person)
- Health (↓ if a person is sick)
- Medication, (↓ or ↑) depending on the situation

One word: children

Only children know how hungry they are, because they are the only ones who can feel the signals their bodies are sending them. Therefore, we cannot dictate how much they eat. They can decide how much food goes in their lunch box or school lunch. When children help prepare their own lunch, they can “guide” their parents on how much food to give them. But since they cannot foresee how hungry they’ll be, we have to accept that they might not eat it all.

Change your tune

Instead of saying “Eat at least half of your lunch,” say “Listen to your hunger.” Good questions to ask:

- How do you know when you are hungry?
- Are you a little hungry, pretty hungry or really hungry?

Hunger scale

Below is a scale we can use to gauge our hunger. Ideally, we should stay between sensations 2 and 4 and avoid extremes. A child who is really hungry (0 - 1) tends to eat too quickly and then feel too full. It’s important to make snacks available to avoid extreme hunger (see the sheet “Snacks”).

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Starving	Very hungry	Hungry	A little hungry	Just right	Full	Too full

Do or don’t?

Drink during mealtimes?

- **Don’t** keep a child from drinking while eating.
- **Do** allow the child to drink while eating.

Drinking can help them chew, swallow and stay hydrated.

If a child tends to drink so much during a meal that they hardly eat, and then they are hungry an hour after the meal, suggest drinking a little less with meals so they have room for food.

Remind them to drink between meals.

Medication

Several medications, such as those used to treat attention deficit disorder, with or without hyperactivity, usually reduce children’s hunger for lunch. We must take the same approach with these children as we do with the others, i.e., we do not force them to eat. If you have questions about a child’s mediation, speak to the nurse. For more information on this topic, see the sheet “Meals and Children’s Individual Needs.”

ASSOCIATION QUÉBÉCOISE DE LA GARDE SCOLAIRE

“Making Mealtimes More Enjoyable” is an AQGS initiative made possible through the assistance and financial support of Québec en forme

Québec EN FORME

Developed by Extenso
Centre de référence sur la nutrition humaine