



## Three Bite Rule

By Dr. Linda Hancock

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Hancock has written a regular weekly column entitled “All Psyched Up” for newspapers in two Canadian provinces for more than a dozen years. Over the years, her readers and clients have said that they have benefited from her common-sense solutions, wisdom, and sense of humour. Dr. Linda Hancock, the author of “Life is An Adventure...every step of the way” and “Open for Business Success” is a Registered Psychologist who has a private practice in Medicine Hat. She can be reached at 403-529-6877 or through email [office@drlindahancock.com](mailto:office@drlindahancock.com)

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I have six grandchildren and each of them is a unique individual. There are, however, similarities in their attitudes and behaviours based on the way they were raised. One of them is a good eater, two are what I would call "excellent" eaters and three are "horrible" when it comes to food.

I have watched what goes on at mealtimes and discreetly asked questions that have provided insight into the behaviours. Because of this, I have been able to work with the children and also provide strategies to help the parents of "picky eaters".

My 3 ½ year old, who is a good eater, has been raised to know that she is fed only at mealtimes. If she chooses not to eat her meal, she waits until the next meal before being fed again. She usually eats her meal!

Some of the things which seem to have contributed to the "horrible" eaters' habits involve parents who:

1. are "picky" eaters themselves;
2. do not like to cook;
3. eat out or order in foods on a regular basis;
4. announce to the public what the children will or won't eat;
5. back up the children when they state that they won't eat something;
6. prepare separate foods for each child;
7. feed the children foods what they want in between meals

In other words, the "tail wags the dog".

(By the way, these are the same children who eat everything when they stay with me and their parents are not present). I'm not bragging but they know that I am more stubborn than they are so they don't even bother getting into a discussion about it anymore.

I feel sorry for these children because they are viewed as rude and spoiled when they are in the presence of other people.

My daughter's children eat everything - even if they don't know what it is!

Since they were little, their mother has used what she calls the "three bite rule". At every meal each child is given three looney-sized bites of every food that has been prepared. Once they have eaten the three bites, they are allowed to have more of anything that is being served. This rule is consistently observed.

On each grocery shopping trip, my daughter purchases one vegetable or fruit that the children hadn't had in the past and these are introduced to the children by using the "three bite rule". Because of this, their diet is all-inclusive.

Waiters in restaurants are always amazed to watch these children order foods that most children would avoid.

My daughter's family is looking forward to a winter holiday in Mexico where they will have an opportunity to try out new ethnic delicacies.

A long time ago, I learned that behaviours usually line up with beliefs and attitudes. When children know that they don't have a choice and that food is interesting, they learn to enjoy a variety of menus. On the other hand, when they think they can state that they don't like something (even if they haven't tried it before) knowing that their parent will prepare something that they want, they will take advantage of this.

As parents, we sometimes cause our own problems! And the sad part is that allowing children to call the shots will actually harm them in the long run.

Try the three bite rule. You may experience resistance at first, but if you are determined and don't give in, it won't be long until you can describe your children as "excellent" eaters.