Does Talking to Infants and Toddlers During Mealtime Increase Acceptance of a Novel Food?

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Introduction

• Best practice for complementary feeding is to focus on responsiveness in feeding to promote food acceptance.
• Responsive feeding includes focusing on positive, nurturing interactions and encouragement.

Study Objective

To determine if more positive verbal prompts from parents was associated with infant and toddler acceptance of a novel food during a single feeding.

Methods

Data collection
• We recruited mother-child dyads (n=46 6-12 mo; n=60 12-24 mo).
• Parents offered children 2-3 tastes of 4 versions of a novel food.
• Sessions were video recorded, then coded for positive neutral, and negative verbal prompts.

Outcomes of interest
• The number of accepted and rejected bites of a novel food.

Data Analyses
• Wilcoxon rank-sums tested differences in the number of accepted and rejected bites between infants and toddlers.
• Spearman correlations tested associations between verbal prompts and accepted bites.

Results

Parents used mostly positive and neutral verbal prompts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of prompt</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Good job. Mmm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>More? This food is green.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>Eat this now. You can have a cookie after you eat this.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

!![chart showing verbal prompts and their outcomes]

Discussion

• Contrary to what we might have hypothesized, positive and neutral prompts were not correlated with increased acceptance of a novel food during a single feeding session.
• Somewhat surprisingly, no talking at all was significantly associated with more accepted bites.
• Age may be a confounder: infants accepted more bites than toddlers did, and mothers of toddlers talked more than mothers of infants did.

Implications

When feeding was going well, mothers left infants and toddlers alone to eat.

When feeding was not going as well as mothers might have hoped, they tried everything they could think of to say to encourage or persuade their young children to eat.

Talking to very young children about food may not influence children’s acceptance of a novel food during a given meal, however patterns of positive interactions could contribute to children’s learning about food and eating.

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