

## Picky eaters? Here's how to get your kids to eat like the French

Canadian Karen Le Billon arrived in her husband's small hometown in Northern France with a couple of picky eaters in tow and her own limited appreciation of French cuisine and food culture.

She was amazed to discover school lunch rooms that serve endive salad and blue cheese, children who wait patiently between meals, and a nation of parents who are masters at avoiding the battle of wills that define so many dinner-table dynamics back home.

Le Billon chronicles her family's gradual but successful shift to the French approach to eating in her new memoir *French Kids Eat Everything — And Yours Can Too* (Collins). The *Star* spoke to Le Billon when she was in Toronto and learned these five hints we can take from our Gallic counterparts.

**1. Stick with a schedule.** French kids have four defined meals a day: breakfast, lunch, *gouter* (late-afternoon snack) and dinner, and parents wouldn't dream of putting their kids in activities from 7 to 8:30 p.m. during dinner. Take a page from their book, even if it means waiting until swimming is over to start a session of gymnastics.

**2. Put down the goldfish.** In North America we scarcely leave the house without our little containers of crackers and cheese in the hope we'll stave off temper tantrums in the grocery aisle. But the French believe constant snacking conditions kids to eat out of boredom and interferes with eating well at mealtimes. "This was a much easier habit to break than I expected," says Le Billon, in part because French children are served foods that keep them feeling full for a while — a cheese course with lunch or some dark-chocolate during *gouter*.

**3. Talk less about health.** In France parents don't cajole with explanations that a food has a lot of iron or calcium, says Le Billon. "For the French, good for you foods taste good. They'd say, 'Eat this fish; it's really yummy.'" Healthy eating habits are a happy byproduct, she says.

**4. Insist they taste everything.** You shouldn't coax your child to clean her plate but do calmly insist she taste everything that's served. "The point is that they taste these things, not that they eat a whole bunch," she writes in a chapter called "The Kohlrabi Experiment." Stick to the tasting rule and after a while it won't prompt an emotional reaction.

**5. Stay calm and confident.** Parents in France are told kids will have to try something seven times before they will even accept it, says Le Billon. They view teaching a child to eat just like teaching a child to read and expect some kids to take longer. Don't be too quick to label your child a picky eater, she says. "You risk creating the behaviour in them rather than telling them 'you will like this when you grow up.'" Expect kids to eat a wider palette and — eventually — they will.