BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

6 Minute English

Stress-free family meals

This is not a word-for-word transcript.

Neil
Hello, this is 6 Minute English from BBC Learning English. I'm Neil.

Georgie
And I'm Georgie.

Neil
Some kids hate eating broccoli. For others, it's mushrooms. And worst of all, of course, are Brussels sprouts! Every parent of young children knows what food they will and won't eat. What food did you dislike as a child, Georgie?

Georgie
Ooh, when I was little, I used to absolutely hate nuts and avocados. But now, as an adult, I absolutely love both of those things.

Neil
I'm not surprised – they're delicious!

Georgie
What about you, Neil? Did you dislike any foods?

Neil
Do you know what? I think I liked most things.

Georgie
Family dinner time can be fun – a chance to reconnect, hear about everyone's day and share a meal. But when children refuse to eat the food that's been cooked, the result is often conflict rather than family fun. BBC Radio 4 programme The Food Chain asked child nutritionist and mother of two Charlotte Stirling-Reed whether her kids eat everything she gives them.

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Charlotte Stirling-Reed
They definitely don't. We go through multiple periods of **ups and downs** where their appetite is much lower, and then all of a sudden it comes right back. It depends on the weather, what they've been doing that day. It can depend on their **mood**.

Neil
At dinner time, Charlotte's children go through **ups and downs**, a phrase meaning that a mixture of good and bad things happen to them. Sometimes they eat everything happily. Other times they don't. It depends on many things, including their day, the weather and their **mood**. A person's **mood** is the way they are feeling at a particular time.

Georgie
So, how can parents make dinnertime something everyone enjoys? In this episode, we'll be hearing from three experts on young children's eating habits and learning some useful new words and phrases too. And remember, you'll find all the vocabulary from this episode, along with a quiz and worksheet, on our website, bbclearningenglish.com.

Neil
But first of course, Georgie, I have a question for you. Charlotte Stirling-Reed is a child nutritionist and she has some tips for stress-free family meals. Which of these do you think she recommends? Is it:

a) make sure your child eats five pieces of fruit and veg a day,
b) don't pressure your child to eat everything on the plate, or
c) introduce your child to lots of new flavours quickly?

Georgie
That's quite hard. They all seem like quite good tips. I'm going to go with c) introduce your child to lots of new flavours quickly.

Neil
OK. We'll find out the answer later in the programme. Dr Anne Fishel is another expert in child nutrition. She co-founded the Family Dinner Project, an organisation promoting children's healthy eating in the US. Here, Anne explains one reason why mealtimes can become stressful, to Ruth Alexander for BBC World Service programme The Food Chain.

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Ruth Alexander
Many parents say dinnertime can become a **battleground**, so why is it that what you're eating can trigger so much tension?

Dr Anne Fishel
I think for small children it's one of the few areas that they have control over. I mean, parents can cook what they want and serve it when they want, but it's up to kids to decide whether they're going to eat it. And for young kids, that's **a big deal**. They have some control.

Georgie
Dinnertime often becomes a **battleground** – a place where argument or conflict happens. Anne thinks that's because it's one of the few areas where children have control. For kids, controlling what they're willing to eat is **a big deal** – something of special importance to them.

Neil
If experts like Charlotte and Anne struggle at mealtimes, imagine how hard it could be if your child has a **food allergy** – a condition where the body makes you sick after eating certain foods. That was the experience of Sharon Wee, a food writer from Singapore, who speaks here with BBC World Service programme The Food Chain.

Sharon Wee
My daughter was born with **allergies** and it was quite a struggle at first. And to be honest with you, we found the **winning formula**, which was rice and beans, and she grew up eating rice and beans probably for the first five years of her life.

Georgie
Sharon's daughter's **allergies** restricted what she could eat, making cooking for the whole family a struggle. Luckily, Sharon discovered the **winning formula** – something her daughter could safely eat – rice and beans. A **winning formula** is a method or strategy that produces successful results.

Neil
So, Georgie, how can parents help their children develop good eating habits? Well, there are some things that our experts all agree upon. For one, give children a choice – for example, by offering small, healthy snacks and dips before the meal. And most importantly of all, create a stress-free atmosphere by not pressurising kids to finish everything on their plate.

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Georgie
Right. Well, that also helps with your quiz question, Neil, so why not go ahead and reveal the correct answer?

Neil
I asked you what child food nutritionist Charlotte Stirling-Reed recommends for stress-free family meals.

Georgie
Yes. I said c) introduce your child to lots of new flavours quickly.

Neil
I'm afraid you were wrong, Georgie. The answer is actually b) don't pressure your child to eat everything on the plate. OK. Let's recap the vocabulary we've learned, starting with **ups and downs** – a phrase describing the mixture of good and bad things that happen to someone.

Georgie
Your **mood** is how you feel at a particular time.

Neil
A **battleground** is a place or situation where argument or conflict happens.

Georgie
If something is **a big deal**, it's of special importance to you.

Neil
A **food allergy** is a medical condition where certain foods make your body sick.

Georgie
And finally, a **winning formula** is a method or strategy that produces successful results. Once again, our six minutes are up, but if you'd like to learn more vocabulary on the topic of food, you can head to our topic page on our website, bbclearningenglish.com. See you again soon. But for now, it's goodbye.

Neil
Goodbye!

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VOCABULARY

ups and downs
a mixture of good and bad things happening to someone

mood
how a person is feeling at a particular time

battleground
place where argument or conflict happens

a big deal
something of special importance

food allergy
medical condition where certain foods make your body sick

winning formula
(idiom) a method or strategy that produces successful results

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