



Good Meal time Behaviours

- Make sure the child is active throughout the day so they are hungry.
- Mealtimes should be enjoyable– try not to become over-anxious as they may pick up on this and become anxious too
- Lead by example – eating regularly together with a wide and varied range of foods. Encourage eating at the table and reduce your distractions i.e. turn off the TV or radio so you and your child can focus on eating.
- Encourage routines to help your child anticipate mealtimes. Your child could be involved in the lead up to meals by washing hands, setting table, finishing their play etc.
- Introduce new food regularly. It takes over 20 tastes before we are accustomed to a taste – fussy eaters need at least this amount of exposure before the taste is familiar. All children will go through phases of fussy eating (usually between 2-3 years of age) so it is worth offering new foods on a regular basis as their tolerance will change.
- Where possible don't make 'separate food' for the child or get into that habit.
- **Never** force feed

Sitting up at the table

- How your child is sitting has a huge impact on how able they are to self-feed. Make sure their feet are on the floor or a footstool so their legs are not dangling (if feeling wobbly or unstable it can be hard to concentrate).
- If your child is fidgety, positioning them against a wall or in the corner i.e. between 2 walls can increase the support around them.
- Think about marking out 'their space' at the table with a large non-slip placemat or on the table with masking tape.
- Assist them to load their cutlery effectively. If they are having difficulty, place your own hand over theirs and help them to complete the task. Make sure that the other hand is supporting the bowl/plate to stop it from moving
- Once your child starts to master feeding with your help, start to reduce this help
- Start with foods which are easy to scoop up e.g. sticky foods like yoghurt, custard, porridge and mashed food, food that is soft is easier e.g. fish fingers

Specialist Equipment

- Use non-slip matting, a damp tea towel or blue tack under the bowl/plate to keep it steady
- Think about the shape of the bowl or plate, does it need a rim? Is it making it difficult to scoop the food?
- If your child is hyper sensitive to touch, they may object to the sensation of a metal spoon in their fingers or in their mouth. Try plastic ones or ones with a plastic/rubber handle.
- Some children respond better to bigger handled cutlery.

Menu Options

- Aim for 3 meals and 2 healthy snacks a day. Crisps and chocolate are treats and should be offered as such i.e. once a week or special occasions.
- Set one menu for the entire family – it would be beneficial to include one of your child's preferred food item at each meal. This will allow the child to have something to eat without needing to cook a separate meal. It also helps you to feel less anxious if he refuses to eat the other foods.
- Be aware of how much liquids your child is having between meals as milk can be particularly filling which will impact on the child's feelings of being hungry.
- Be aware of portion sizes – too much food on a plate can be overwhelming. Smaller portions for resistant eaters allows them to see the results when they have taken a few small bites.
- Try to present foods in different presentations i.e. mashed potatoes, roast potatoes, chips etc. Some children do not like the texture of some vegetables but do like the taste and they may be more likely to try a new vegetable if it is presented in a familiar texture i.e. raw or mashed.
- Try offering a choice i.e. of vegetables – this helps the child have a degree of control. Initially use one vegetable you know he has eaten and enjoyed i.e. mashed potatoes and one new vegetable sweet corn. Some families have found it helpful having a shared plate or serving dishes so everyone can help themselves, modelling good mealtime behaviours.

Helpful Play Activities (not for mealtimes)

Sucking and blowing during play can help 'work out' the muscles in the mouth and can give positive experiences involving the mouth that is not connected to eating. It may be beneficial to do these before a meal to help the mouth "get ready" for mealtimes.

Sucking

- Using longer, curly, thinner straws or bundles of straws.
- Use a straw to drink yoghurt/ thinned fruit puree/ smoothies, milk shakes .
- Sucking frozen fruit or ice cubes.
- Lollipops.

Blowing

- Blowing bubbles using a straw in a cup/bowl.
- Musical instruments.
- With straw or mouth, blow football using cotton wool balls, paper or feathers.
- Blowing out cheeks and then pressing the air out of them with hands

Chewing

- Liquorice, chewy sweets, dried fruit, pepperami, cheese.
- Chewy toys designed to improve jaw strength (Chewy Tubes)
- Water bottles with 'sports tops'

Using cutlery

- Any games or activities which encourage the child to hold one hand still whilst moving the other hand will help with the foundation skills for using cutlery.
- Using a dustpan and brush – emphasis on keeping the dustpan still and moving the brush. Your child may be tempted to move both together at the same time.
- Cooking / Baking – holding a bowl while mixing with a spoon or spooning the mixture out of the bowl.
- Encourage scooping during play ie sand into a bucket, dried lentils into a bowl etc
- Try cutting up playdough or pastry dough. Look to see if they are holding the cutlery correctly. Model what they need to do and if necessary give them hand over hand help to “feel” what they are supposed to be doing. Emphasize the technique and sequence.