

# Fuss Free Mealtimes

Supporting children to learn to enjoy and behave well at meals can start now. This will set them up to be happy eaters for life! Use the following tips to create positive mealtimes.



## Make mealtimes enjoyable

Choose to create positive food experiences at mealtimes.

- Eat meals as a family. Allow enough time to enjoy meals together
- Talk calmly and positively
- Try eating in other places (like a backyard picnic)

## Parent provides, child decides

When you do your job with mealtimes, your child will learn to do theirs.

- A parent's job is to provide the food and choose when and where a child will eat
- A child's job is to decide if they will eat and how much
- Avoid offering alternatives for uneaten meals
- Taking time to like foods is part of normal development



## Trust their tummies

Let the decision to stop eating be theirs. Children naturally stop when they are full.

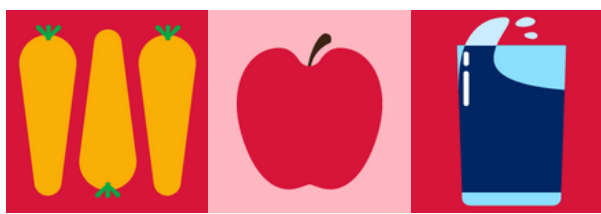
- Resist pressuring your child to eat
- Avoid force feeding, coaxing or bribing
- Provide small serves and offer more if still hungry
- Allow your child to decide how much to eat
- If your child is full, accept their decision to stop eating



## Stick to a simple routine

Children love routine. Having a food routine helps children know what to expect.

- Offer food every 2-3 hours – that's three meals with small snacks in between
- Limit grazing so children are hungry at mealtimes
- Have a before meal routine with a pack up or 'get ready' warning and washing hands
- Have an after meal routine like clearing the table



## Repeat, repeat, repeat

It can take over 10 times for a child to accept a new food, so keep offering it.

- Offer new food next to food your child already likes
- Introduce one new food at a time
- Try separating foods so they are not touching
- Cook foods in different ways like raw, steamed or baked
- Make food fun, like using cookie cutters to create shapes



## Be a positive role model

Your family is your child's first teacher.

- Model eating and enjoying a variety of foods together
- Eat as a family serving the same food to everyone
- Don't be rude to food. Be respectful about food
- Don't yuck my yum, everyone has different tastes
- Try not to overreact in what you say or with body language

## Avoid distraction

Parents and children can both be distracted at mealtimes.

- Switch off all screens including TV, iPad and phone
- Put toys away
- Use mealtimes as a chance to talk



## Food isn't a good reward

Using food as a reward can change a child's relationship with food.

- Avoid food rewards like "if you don't eat your vegetables you won't get dessert" or "clean your room and you will get a chocolate"
- If looking to reward behaviour, try non-food based rewards like extra play time, stickers, praise, a visit to the park

## Involve children

Children are more likely to try food they've explored in some way.

- Involve children in vegetable gardening, meal planning, shopping, cooking and food play
- Ask your child to help set the table, choose a placemat, plate or cup
- Encourage smelling, touching and tasting familiar and unfamiliar foods
- Let children feed themselves – mess is okay



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