

3 Relaxed mealtimes



Babies are born with the ability to eat exactly the right amount of food for their bodies. With support from you they can keep this skill as they grow up. The three key steps to happy meals are routine, eating together and avoiding pressure.

Routine:

- Children need the routine of regular meals and snacks.
- It is the adults job to offer three meals and two to three snacks every day. If children are asking for food between meal or snack times offer them water. This will allow them to come to their next meal or snack hungry but not starving.
- It is the child's job to decide how much they want to eat.

Eat Together:

- A family meal is when the the family eats together and shares the same food.
- A family meal can be breakfast, lunch or dinner.
- When eating together turn off the TV, phones and other screens.
- Make meal-times more enjoyable by focusing on each other and not the food.
- Encourage children to serve themselves and choose how much of the meal they eat.
- Children who have regular family meals feel better about themselves, get along better with other people, and do better at school.

Avoid Pressure:

- Pressure is when an adult tries to make a child eat more or less food.
- Pressure on children's eating will give the opposite effect and can lead to unhappy meal times.
- Adults often worry that it's their job to 'get the food into their child'. This can lead to pressure on a child to eat in a certain way.
- Pressure can be praising, nagging, bribing, talking too much about how 'good' a food is, restricting foods like dessert, begging, physically forcing, or threatening.
- Pressure is also making a child eat their vegetables, warning that they will be hungry if they don't eat all their food, making children use cutlery a certain way, making a special meal just for the child, and hiding vegetables in other food.
- It is important to let children eat the amount that they want as their stomach is only the size of their fist. Children are naturally good at knowing when they are full.
- If you are anxious about your child's eating, try not to show it. Your child may feel watched and under pressure. This might keep them from eating as best as they can.

Parents Provide, Children Decide

'Parents provide, children decide' is a simple way to take the stress out of mealtimes. 'Parents provide, children decide' can help your child learn to eat the amount of food that is right for their body.

Parents provide - parent's feeding jobs:

- Choose and prepare the food.
- Provide regular meals and snacks.
- Make eating times pleasant.
- Show children, by example, how to behave at family mealtimes.
- Offer children new foods without catering to likes and dislikes.
- Offer your child water between regular meal and snack times but not other drinks or food.
- Let your child grow and develop in their own way.

Children decide - children's eating jobs:

- Eat the snack or meal.
- Eat the amount they need.
- Learn to eat the food their parents eat.
- Learn to behave well at mealtime.

Your child's body is growing. Some days they need more food than other days. As long as you do your part in providing for your child, they will do their part in deciding how much to eat. As children grow, so will their appetite. You may notice this when they start primary school but don't worry if some days they eat less. Remember these 'Parents provide, children decide' guidelines to help children eat the right amount of food and create happy and fun meal times.