



Healthy Mealtimes

Learning to eat and enjoy a range of healthy foods and to enjoy mealtimes starts early for your child.

Your child's early years are the best time to establish healthy eating behaviours that can last for their whole life.

Food preferences begin in infancy, before your child has even started eating solid foods, and develop as they make the transition from breastmilk or formula to solids. How your child sees you and other caregivers act at mealtimes and how you behave with and talk about food has an important influence.

You can help your child try new foods and develop a healthy and positive attitude to mealtimes by:

- being positive about new foods and healthy foods
- being willing to repeatedly encourage your child to try new foods
- trying new foods alongside your child
- modelling the sort of mealtime behaviour that you'd like from them.

Healthy mealtimes and your baby

Even before your baby is ready to eat solid foods, breastmilk can help to prepare them for the flavours they will encounter when they start eating solids. The foods eaten change the taste of breastmilk, giving your baby early exposure to new flavours.

Once your baby is able to hold on to solid food, they're ready to participate in family mealtimes. You might like to try bringing their highchair to your meal area so your child can observe your family meals.

Family meals

Try to make eating meals together a priority for your family. Sharing meals together provides an opportunity for you to model positive mealtime behaviour and to encourage your child to try new things.

At family meals:

- Always sit down for meals and snacks and use the opportunity to talk with your child.
- Consume the same food as your child.
- Let your child serve themselves, but encourage them to taste all the food offered.
- Let your child eat at their own pace. You decide what, they decide how much.
- Do not use food as a reward, a punishment or a pacifier.
- Pack away play materials and set the table or other suitable space; encouraging your child to help.
- Use tablecloths or placemats to make mealtimes more special.
- Expect mess at mealtimes, more so from younger children, and try not to react negatively. However, do not tolerate playing with food, including spitting or throwing food.

This Parent Fact Sheet is available in different community languages and can be downloaded along with references from www.ecconnections.com.au

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