



# General Mealtime Strategies

Children only need to eat every 2.5 (approximate) hours. Try to avoid snacks within 2.5 hours of mealtimes so they are able to read their own hunger cues and so they are hungry at mealtimes.

Avoid sugary foods before mealtimes as they suppress the appetite.

Try to be consistent in where food is presented ie. At table and away from distractions.

Try to use plain placemat and plates rather than pictures as too much colour and visual busyness can overwhelm children and affect eating.

Make food and family time the focus of mealtimes rather than using a crutch such as the TV or toys as a distraction.

Use the steps to eating guide:

- Consider where your child is at on the scale with each food
- Aim to progress to the next step rather than straight to accepting and eating foods

Don't discourage playing with foods as this is a good way to explore foods and progress up the steps.

Talk about the foods, what they look like, what they feel like in fingers, how they feel on lips, how they feel in mouth (don't progress too quickly though).

Conduct food play/exploration 2-3 times a week where food is explored without any expectation to eat the food. Play with food at the child's level and with their interests in mind.

- Pretend a carrot stick is a train;
- Pretend it is a train whistle and put to lips.

Present 1-2 new foods with foods that will accept

- Try to choose new foods that have something in common with accepted foods ie colour, shape, texture.

Present foods in a buffet style at table where they can serve themselves and make choices on foods.

Place a discard bowl on the table where they can put foods that they do not want to try if they wish. This can also be used as a spit bowl if they try something they do not like. At this stage of development spitting food out is not rude; it is a necessity in the steps to eating framework.

Have the child clean their own plate into the bin after meal times.

Set 25-30 minutes for dinner time where family stays at table and interacts. When the time is up, clean plates into bowl and move on with routine.

