

HAPPY MEALTIMES

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Mealtime can be a hard time. It can be frustrating for many reasons. Naturally, you want your child to eat well. Every parent does. Every child, with or without special needs, finds mealtime a good time to get a lot of attention and experiment a little with control. So let's talk a little about meal times and things that are common to all children. Maybe this will help you think about a feeding problem you are having and look at it in a new way. Maybe one or two little changes can make things easier on both you and your child in the long run.

Children eat best if it's quiet and peaceful.

- ✓ Turn off the TV!
- ✓ Turn down the music!
- ✓ Play soft, restful music.
- ✓ Cut down on anything that keeps your child distracted from eating.

Children eat best if mealtime is a happy, relaxed time.

- ✓ Mealtime is not a good time for arguments. Save correcting and disciplining for another time.
- ✓ Include your child at mealtime even if your child isn't eating. If your child is tube fed, it is important for him/her to join the family to watch and learn how to eat at the table. If your tube-fed child can take anything by mouth, this is a good time to give it.

Children eat best when they're hungry.

- ✓ Try giving a new food when your child is hungry. Remember: All children take their time getting used to new foods. They usually have to see a new food a few times, feel it and then taste it a few times. Then they may actually eat it!
- ✓ Watch out for too many snacks and drinks too close to mealtime! Try to give snacks at least 2 hours before a meal. Give water if your child wants a drink right before mealtime.

Children eat small amounts.

- ✓ Children only need a small amount of food at each meal. Do not try to force food if your child appears to be full.

Children like to know when they are going to eat.

A regular schedule of meals and snacks can help your child grow. Having them on a schedule allows them to learn to eat at certain times, not a little bit at a time, all day long. Children also like to know that their needs will be taken care of. Regular meals and snacks make children feel secure.



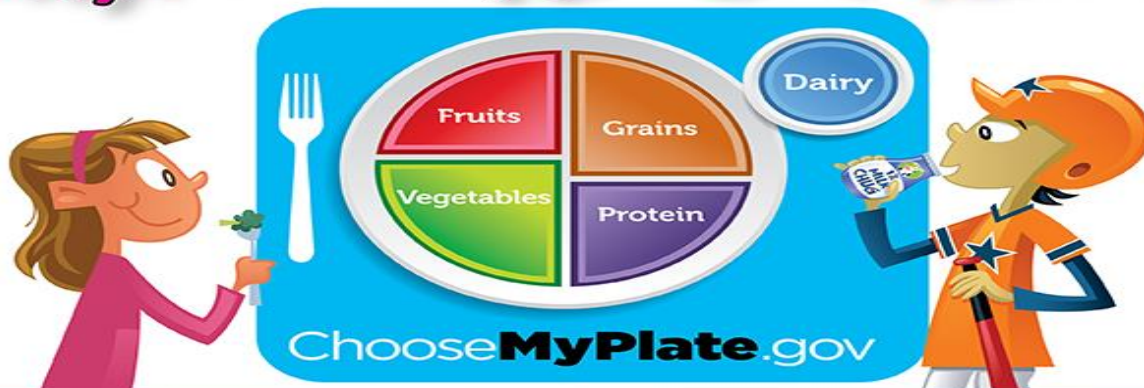
Children want to know their limits.

- ✓ They want to know what their limits are and, of course, they want to test them. How far can I go? What can I get away with? This is all part of the learning process with children.
- ✓ You may spend a lot of time with your child with special health care needs, so there are a lot of chances for your child to test the limits! You may also have more emotion about the feeding situation and things in general.
- ✓ Sometimes feelings of guilt (even though you have nothing to be guilty about!) make you want to forget about setting limits. But your child needs to learn what is and is not acceptable behavior. Two good people to talk to about setting limits are the social worker and the nutritionist.
- ✓ Also talk to them if you are concerned about any of your child's behaviors at mealtime.



Remember....

MyPlate Kids' Place



- Give your child small servings from each food group of MyPlate at each meal.
- Children's appetites are different from day to day. This is normal.
- If you are worried about how much your child is eating, first look at **WHAT** your child is eating. Make sure that all your child's food choices are nutritious.
- Snacks should be healthy.
- Give lowfat milk (for children >2 year of age) or water with meals.
- Don't give junk foods, colas, sugary drinks, or iced tea!

Children do **NOT** like to be **FORCED** to eat. Instead of forcing your child to eat, try these things:

- ✓ Let your child get used to new foods. This could include seeing new foods, seeing other people eat them, playing with them, feeding them to a doll, or tasting them paired with a favorite food.
- ✓ Give your child choices. "Would you like this or would you like that?" Children often like the feeling of having some control. Making a choice gives them control. This is not the same as saying "What do you want then, if you don't want this?"
- ✓ Stay calm! Of course you want your child to eat what you fixed, but pressure doesn't work.
 - Try positive reinforcement instead. Stay quiet when you have a refusal or a "yuk" or other negative reaction. Try not to give it any attention at all. Turn away. If you are feeding your child, try again after a few seconds. If your child refuses the food again, wait a few minutes.
 - Feed your child another food. Then go back to the food they refused. If your child refuses the food a third time, calmly remove the child from the table without fussing, and do not feed the child again until the next meal or snack, 1-2 hours later. It is hard to stay calm but this training works very well.



NOTES especially for you!

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