

The Importance of the Family Meal

Is your child a picky eater? Did you know that eating together at the table as a family can actually help your child expand his food repertoire? Passing the foods around family style and sharing foods also helps build family bonds. Making mealtime fun without pressure to eat can go a long way over time. Keep conversation positive and not focused on food and eating. If it's fun to be with the family during dinner he will be exposed to a variety of healthy foods over time. It could take 88 exposures to a food before your child may try it. It could take 20 times of trying a food before he will eat it and like it. Be patient. Keep trying.

First, start with getting your child to sit at the table. How you may ask? Every child is different. Ask your child's speech therapist for ways to get your child to sit with you and your family without television and other distractions. Start each meal with a prayer or song or a routine, indicating the beginning of the meal. Do NOT use other foods or desserts as a reward. Praise your child for sitting. Praise him for using good manners. Praise your other children for sitting or coming to the table too. Your child should only eat if he is sitting. You can say, "When it's dinner time we sit." Build up to 20-25 minutes.

Use of the "TRY BOWL"

Trying new foods can be over whelming to your child for a variety of reasons (Sensory, oral motor skills, behavioral). Try using another small plate called "The Try Bowl /Plate". Place it in front of your child's plate. Present your child with a food your child will eat in his own plate (preferred food). One or two small pieces of new foods can be presented and placed in your child's plate or the try plate, depending on where your child wants it. Let your child know he doesn't have to eat the new food. He can put it in his try bowl. Just tolerating it on the try bowl is a step closer to someday tasting it or eating it. Do not coerce your child into eating it. The adults and other eaters are models for trying new foods. The more your child stays at the table the more he is likely to try new foods on his own terms. Playing with food, moving it around the plate with utensils all count as tolerating the food. Don't make a big deal out of tasting or touching the foods. When mealtime is over, have your child bring the dish to the counter or clean it off into the garbage or dog dish. That's tolerating and interacting with the food. Praise him for helping. Mealtime is over for your child and he gets another chance to eat in 2 hours at snack time.

Some tips to help:

NO grazing between meals and snacks. Children should have 3 meals and a small snack 2-2.5 hours after a meal so that they may be hungrier during meal time. Only serve water in between meals and snacks. Talk to your child's speech therapist for more information.