

Children's appetites change from day to day due to their level of activity, growth, and general health. Mealtimes can also be a difficult task for children. They may present with behaviours including being fussy, eating slowly, playing with food, have difficulty sitting at a table for meals, or having tantrums. Many children will go through a period of fussy eating at some stage however for some it can be more of a challenge.

Top tips for developing skills at mealtimes:

Establish a mealtime and snack routine. If your child doesn't eat a meal, avoid the temptation to try again in an hour so that your child learns the difference between hungry and full. Talk about feeling hungry, and after meals feeling full.



Try supportive seating. Children should be sitting with their hips, knees, and ankles all bent at 90°. You can achieve this with an adjustable high-chair, booster seat or steps. Having feet supported can help your child feel more stable and comfortable so they can develop their independent feeding skills.



Limit mealtimes to about 15-30 minutes. Finish sooner if your child refuses, throws food, or engages in other challenging behaviour.

Make time for play each day so your child receives attention at other times of the day and learns that play times are separate to mealtime.



Have mealtimes together as a family or with other children. Your child will learn new mealtime skills from watching others. Where possible, try and minimize distractions like TV, playing games or using toys during mealtimes.



Keep offering variety, the same as the rest of the family. Sometimes it can take up to 20 tastes for a child to know whether they like or don't like a new food!



Give a smaller portion than you think your child will eat so they can experience the achievement of completing the snack or meal.

Think about the presentation of your child's food and make it look attractive and fun!

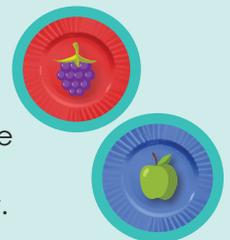


Offer solid foods first, then follow with liquids. Drinking liquids will fill your child's stomach so that they may not be as hungry for solids.

Let your child help prepare food if possible. By being involved, your child will be more likely to trust it.



Give your child opportunities for choice on your terms by offering them choices (e.g., apple or pear, red or blue plate). Mealtimes are one of the first ways that children can assert control over their environment.



If you have any concerns regarding your child's mealtimes speak to your Child Health Nurse, GP or a health professional. Alternatively, you can contact the team at CliniKids on (08) 6319 1133 or clinkids@telethonkids.org.au