

FAMILY MEALS AND ROUTINES

Determining the feeding structure — the when and where of eating — is the adult's job. Scheduled meals and snacks provide plenty of opportunities for children to get the nutrition they need.

Our bodies adapt to eating routines, and soon your child will become predictably hungry at scheduled meals.

GETTING STARTED WITH ROUTINES

- 1 Have sit-down meals and snacks at reliable times.
The timing of meals and snacks must be the adult's idea.
- 2 Offer planned, sit-down snacks midway between meals. Toddlers need to be offered food about every two to three hours and older children every three hours.
- 3 Don't allow food or beverages (aside from water) in between meals and snacks.
- 4 Don't use food to stop or prevent a tantrum, and avoid using food to comfort your child.
- 5 Getting ready for mealtime starts well before the meal. Institute a calming transitional routine before eating.
- 6 Eat at a set location, preferably the table. If possible, sit down and eat with your child during meals and snacks.

MAKE IT A FAMILY MEAL

Family meals are an important part of the eating structure. Children and teens who have family meals eat better, feel better about themselves, get along better with other people and do better in school. They are less likely to gain too much weight, abuse drugs or smoke.

- 1 Sit down together, face each other, share the same foods and enjoy conversations.
- 2 Avoid distractions such as phones, TV, games, iPads, etc.
- 3 Have food you enjoy. A family meal can be takeout, delivery, microwaved or cooked from scratch.
- 4 Let children know they do not have to eat, but ask that they please join you at the table for family time.
- 5 Be realistic about mealtime rules. Toddlers may only want to sit for five minutes, preschoolers a little longer and school-aged children may want to sit for a long time if it's a pleasant place.
- 6 Follow the division of responsibility in feeding. Your job is done once the food is on the table; it's then up to your child to decide what and how much to eat. Avoid comments about how much or which foods children are eating.
- 7 Children as young as 2 years old can begin to serve themselves. To manage food waste, encourage children to take small portions at first and let them know they can always ask for more.
- 8 Be a good role model. Family meals are a great way to teach children the skill of eating, how to behave at the table and to help them learn to like new foods.
- 9 Enjoy conversations that do not center on the food at the table.

The feeding advice in this handout is based on Ellyn Satter's principles and guidelines.
For more about Satter's work, visit ellynsatterinstitute.org.



WEEK 3: PLANNING A FAMILY MEAL

1 What meal (breakfast, lunch, dinner) will you eat together?

2 Who will be present at the meal?

3 What time will you have the meal?

4 How, if at all, will you rearrange schedules to make sure everyone can eat together?

5 What food will be served (can be homemade, takeout, microwaved, etc.)?

6 How much time do you need to prepare for the meal?

7 If making the meal from scratch, what can you prepare ahead of time?

8 How can you involve your child in the meal process?

9 How can this meal be served family-style?

10 How can you involve your child at the table?

11 What kind of conversations can you have?

12 How will you minimize distractions?

13 How will you manage poor behavior?
