



# FAMILY MEAL TIME

**T**he atmosphere of family meals

should be positive. Preparing and eating meals and snacks with your children can make family meals more enjoyable.

- ☺ Plan to eat together. If you're too busy for daily meals, try two to three times a week.
- ☺ Plan an occasional lunch or dinner date, free from distractions.
- ☺ Turn the television off during mealtime. The family can concentrate on eating and discussing the day's events with each other.
- ☺ Encourage your children to try new foods. Offer small amounts at first. Research indicates a child needs to be exposed to a food 8-12 times before the food is accepted. Remember if you only feed your children hamburgers and French fries, that will be the only food they are comfortable with.
- ☺ Never require children to eat everything on their plates.
- ☺ Food should only be used to satisfy hunger, not as a reward or punishment.
- ☺ Plan dessert as a part of the meal, but don't withhold it because the child does not eat enough.
- ☺ Remember that all foods eaten in moderation, even sweets, are okay. There are no "good" or "bad" foods.

☺ Include your child in the planning, shopping and preparing of family meals and snacks.

## How to Deal with a Picky Eater

- ✓ Food should not be used as a pacifier, reward or punishment. These give food an emotional value which may lead to an inappropriate eating response.
- ✓ Parents often are concerned that their children are not eating enough. If growth is within normal range, they are getting enough. Speak with your physician or registered dietitian if you have additional concerns.
- ✓ Set a good example by making good food choices yourself.
- ✓ If your child doesn't like a specific food, offer a substitute of equal nutritional value.
- ✓ Practice variety, by allowing your child to choose three different foods at mealtime.
- ✓ Let your children help in the kitchen. If they help plan and prepare the food,



they will be more likely to eat that food. Always supervise their activities.

✓ Stay calm at the table. Mealtime should be an enjoyable experience.

## Nutritional Substitutes

**If your child won't eat a variety of foods, try these nutritionally equal substitutes**

If your child won't...	TRY...
eat meat	poultry, fish, beans, peanut butter, eggs, cheese, nuts or tofu. These foods are important for protein, calcium, iron and zinc.
eat green vegetables	carrots, sweet potatoes, squash, corn, beets and peas. These are less bitter.
eat any vegetables	bananas, apples, pears and grapes. These offer similar nutrients. Other fruits high in vitamin A to try, include apricots, mangos, peaches, nectarines and blueberries. OR try guava, oranges, tangerines, strawberries and grapefruit which are excellent sources of vitamin C. OR try fruits high in both vitamins A and C, papaya, cantaloupe, watermelon and persimmons.
drink milk	yogurt, cheese, cottage cheese, pudding, custard, creamed soups, chocolate or flavored milk, calcium-fortified soy milk or orange juice and ice cream. These products provide the calcium found in milk and are often tolerated better by those who have digestive upsets from regular milk.
eat casseroles & mixed dishes	plain pasta, rice or noodles and dry cereal.

### References

- The Food Guide Pyramid, Home and Garden Bulletin #252, USDA, 1992.
- The American Dietetic Association's Complete Food & Nutrition Guide, Roberta Duyff, 1996.
- Eat Smart: A Guide to Good Health, John McDougall, 1997.

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