

## SCHOOLS

# Eating and Drinking

**What does Eating and Drinking mean?**

Some children find it difficult to eat and drink the right things at the right time. These habits can affect their health, how well they function during the day, especially at school when concentration is needed, and their sleeping patterns. Families with children who experience these difficulties can also feel considerable amounts of stress and anxiety as these habits are negatively affecting their child.

**Strategies to Help the Child's Eating and Drink****Environment**

- Eating is a sociable occasion. Ensure that the child eats with others at lunch/snack times as much as possible.
- Try to eat in the same place so that place and food become associated.
- Try to remain calm and relaxed - don't let the child become aware of your anxieties or annoyance.
- Encourage eating with friends or in a group - children often copy each other.

**Positioning**

- Ensure the child has appropriate and safe seating; think about height from the table, being able to reach cutlery etc.
- Place any drink in a position that it cannot easily be knocked over.
- Sit opposite the child if possible and provide feedback. "Good eating" etc.

**Timing**

- Establish a routine of some sort. Try to eat roughly at the same times each day. Try to have a set pattern to meals and snacks.
- Try not to rush slow eaters, but don't let meals drag on. Set a time limit - about 20 minutes. After this take the food away. Most young children will have lost interest by this time and the food will have become cold and therefore unappetizing.

**Independence**

- Don't worry about mess! Put a plastic sheet on the floor if necessary.
- Allow the child to explore the food. Provide different textures, vary the temperature, (not too hot or cold!), try a range of tastes.
- Allow the child to try to feed him/herself. If you are feeding the child by spoon, give them a spoon as well and encourage them to copy.
- Get unbreakable plastic plates and bowls which have sides on. This helps the child to be able to push the food against the side to fill the spoon.

**Behaviour**

- If the child starts to throw food, be firm and say "No!" If they carry on remove the food.
- Remember to praise them for 'good eating' - be positive, reinforce with a smile.

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- If the faddy eater stops, try once to encourage him/her to take a little more. Show them how pleased you are if they carry on. If not, remove the food and wait for the next snack/meal.
- If the meal is refused, don't offer anything else until the next meal is due.

#### Which foods?

- Initially offer food you know the child likes, this will encourage good sitting etc. Gradually increase the variety by adding small amounts of new foods. Give lots of praise.
- Don't offer too much variety at once, two or maybe three foods on a plate is enough. More is confusing.
- Give small portions. It's easy to give more and success is more likely.
- Offer food which is easy to handle. Cut meat before it's put on the plate. Give pasta shapes rather than spaghetti! Add gravy or custard to dry foods.
- Some foods stick to spoons better than others! Experiment! Mashed potato is good.
- If the child cannot manage a spoon, offer finger foods to allow them to experiment.
- Save treats such as crisps, chocolate and sweets, for after a meal has been eaten. Only offer these in small portions. Try to save them for the end of the day. (Even better, keep these foods as a weekly treat! Have a sweetie day!).
- The child may need a snack between meals. Try fruit, fresh or dried. There are many healthier choices around now to snack. Experiment. Give the child a small sandwich or pita bread.

#### Drinks

- Children can fill up on drinks. How much milk does your child have when s/he gets up? Does this fill them up?
- As a general rule don't offer any drinks for about 30 minutes before a meal as this may fill them up. Give water between meals.
- If you do give juice, water it down. Don't give sweetened juice in bottles - it will damage their teeth.

