



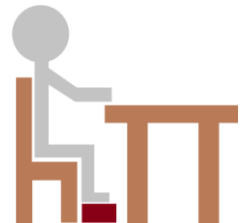
Good Feeding Practice

Information leaflet for parents/ carers

Mealtimes can be a stressful time of the day for many children and their families. There can be many reasons for this including the surroundings, positioning, the child's developmental progress and control of movement. Feeding skills are learnt over time needing lots of opportunity to experience and practice; the more practice your child does the quicker the skill will be learnt. Fun and relaxed mealtimes are more successful. It is important for your child to have a consistent approach at home & school etc to develop these skills. Some ideas to help you and your child develop their feeding skills:

Preparing the environment

- Reduce distractions (i.e. turn off TV and other electronic devices)
- In order for your child to use their hands to develop feeding skills, i.e. to hold cutlery, it is important to have a good sitting position. The optimum posture for use of hands is to sit at a table with forearms resting on the table and feet supported. If your child sits at adult sized furniture and their feet are unable to reach the floor, try using a stool under their feet or a booster seat.
- Consider using a non-slip mat to stabilise plate/bowl
- Enjoy social time by sitting together with your child at mealtimes; this will help to model positive eating and self-feeding skills.
- Limit snacks before mealtimes so the child will feel hungry before their meal.



Preparing your child

- Tell your child when food is nearly ready to give them a cue. Ask them to sit to the table when food is ready to eat to avoid waiting and frustration.
- Give your child some choice and control to make eating a positive experience.
- Where possible encourage your child to be involved in food preparation, this will help them to be more motivated to eat the food.
- Encourage your child to feed themselves as much as possible; getting messy might be part of the process.
- Eating preferences may vary depending on culture, affecting environment, tools and routines.



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How to make the task easier

- Help your child to understand mealtime routines; such as washing hands before food allowing them to be prepared, how long they are expected to sit to the table and what will happen after food.
- Stages of developing feeding skills:
 - Hands to mouth, this may be in play and during meals
 - Finger feeding
 - Uses a spoon
 - Uses a fork
 - Eats with fork and spoon
 - Uses a knife and fork to cut up and eat their food.
- Consider the stage your child is able to manage and when you could begin to move them onto the next stage. Your child may not be at the expected level for their age but this is okay, learning independent eating skill is a process we all move through.
- You can help your child by offering different levels of support, such as giving hand over hand assistance and demonstration.

Hints and tips:

- Give lots of praise and encourage your child with positive instructions; avoid using negative descriptions during mealtimes.
- Avoid forcing your child to clear their plate
- Try to make sure the child has one thing they really like on their plate
- Some children prefer to dish their own portion of food
- If you have concerns regarding how much your child is eating please discuss this with your GP or Health Visitor.