



Mealtime Problems

Mealtime is often stressful for parents. Children might be picky about what foods they will and will not eat. They may want the same food at every meal. Some children might refuse to come to the table or to stay at the table until they are done eating. Often these problems are short-lived.

How can I prevent problems at mealtime?

- **Keep a regular meal and snack schedule and routine.** Avoid snacks and heavy drinks before mealtime.
- **Have meals as a family.** Have your child eat at the table. Turn the TV off during mealtimes.
- **Provide age-appropriate portions.** Portion sizes for fruits, vegetables, or grains should be the size of your child's fist. Portions of meats and other proteins should be the size of your child's palm.
- **Do not insist on a clean plate.** You provide food, children decide what and how much to eat.
- **Explain rules at the start of the meal.** Provide sensible consequences for not following rules, such as the loss of privileges after a meal.
- **Offer praise and attention when they show good eating behaviors.** Avoid using food as a reward or consequence.
- **Don't react to minor behavior problems** like being loud, whining, or not eating. Be patient—ignoring is difficult and does not work immediately.
- **Increase the variety of food.** Introduce one food at a time. Continue offering foods that your child has previously refused. It can typically take multiple tries before a child will accept a new food. Don't give up, try and try again!



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