

Tips for mealtimes



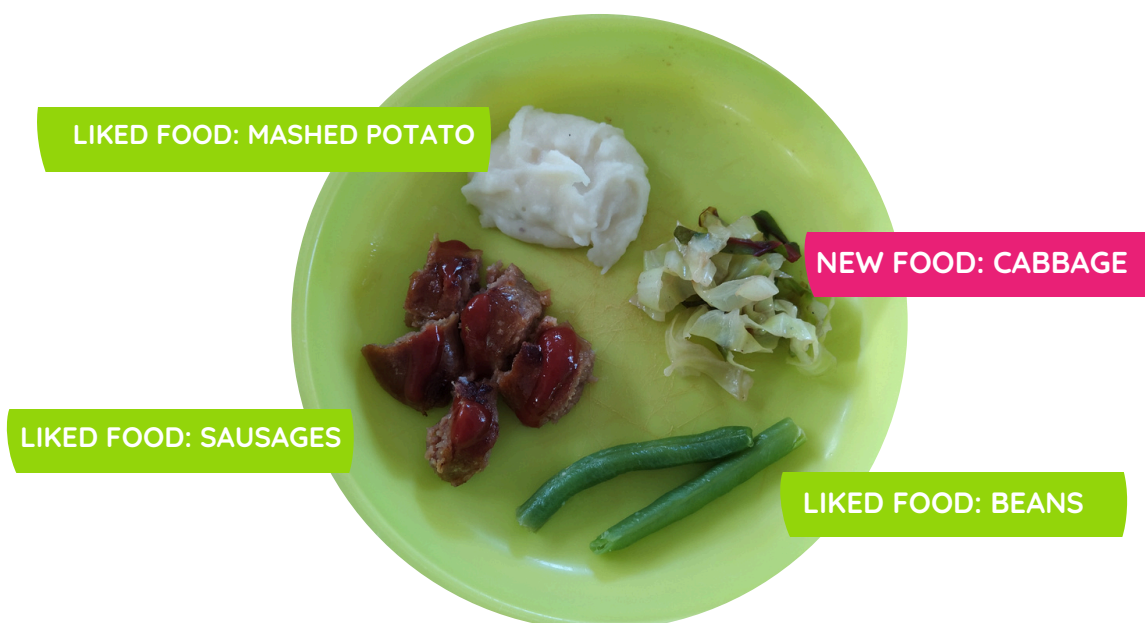
Little Eaters

Choosing what to eat, or what not to eat, is all part of childhood development. It's a way for children to explore their environment and assert independence.

- They may not like the taste, shape, colour, or texture of particular foods.
- They may like something one day but dislike it the next or sometimes refuse to try new foods.
- Their appetites change all the time due to growth spurts, activity levels or sickness, so they may eat more on some days and less on others.
- They have short attention spans for mealtimes – children are very interested in the world around them!
- They may take 15-20 attempts of one food to add it into their 'familiar' or 'preferred' foods. Be patient, try not to over complicate meals and allow children to become familiar.

Create a routine

- Schedule snacks and meals at least 2-3 hours apart. This allows enough time for your child to develop an appetite between snacks and meals.
- Always serve unfamiliar food with familiar foods (safe and trusted) so that your child knows that there is something that they like to eat.
- Using verbal prompts prior to mealtimes can help children transition from one activity to the next. For example, “in 5 minutes, it will be time to come to the table for dinner”.



Check the mealtime environment

- Have a dedicated space for family mealtimes.
- Children learn best through role modelling. Be present during mealtimes and eat alongside your child.
- Limit distractions when possible (if this works for your child)
- Check your child's seating. Children should be in a seat where their feet are flat on the floor, knees are bent at a 90° angle, and their back is supported upright.



Take the pressure off

- Children know intuitively how much food they need to eat for growth, development and play. We need to allow children to trust their bodies.
- Let your child choose what they would like to eat from the foods offered.
- Let children eat as little or as much as they feel their body needs.
- Avoid pressuring, prompting, or encouraging your children to eat certain foods or amounts. Saying things like “just one more bite” is pressure.

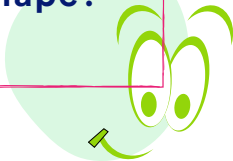
We say

**“You don’t have to eat it”
“How is your tummy feeling?”
“Is your tummy feeling hungry?”
“Is your tummy feeling full now?”**

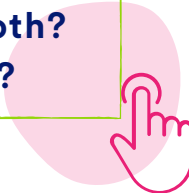
Conversations during mealtimes

- Family meals can be a great time to catch up and connect with each other.
- Conversations during mealtimes don't have to focus on the food itself. Take turns sharing something good or fun about the day.
- If you are talking about food, explore the food together using your five senses.

LOOK
What is the
foods...Colour?
Size? Shape?



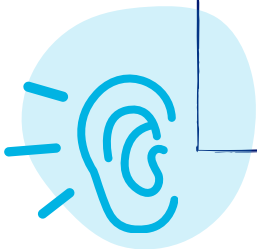
TOUCH
Is it...wet? dry?
soft? hard? cold?
hot? smooth?
bumpy?



SMELL
is the
smell...big?
small? strong?



SOUND
Is it...
Loud? Quiet?
Crunchy?
Squeaky?



TASTE
Is it...
big? small? sweet?
sour? salty? spicy?

When to seek support from health professionals

If your child is showing some or all of the following signs:

- Your child eats less than 20 different foods
- Foods are lost due to food fads and not liked again after taking a break
- Almost always eats different foods than the family and often doesn't eat with them
- Upset with new foods or complete refusal, will not try a new food after 10 or more exposures
- Refuses entire categories of food groups or textures
- You are concerned about growth or appetite
- Gut instinct!

Where to seek support from health professionals

There are many healthcare professionals who work with children with feeding challenges. Your GP can be a great place to start for an overall check-up.

Other healthcare professionals who can help include Dietitians, Speech Pathologists, Occupational Therapists, and Psychologists.

Better Health Network offers a range of allied health care services who can provide help and support to your child and family. Speak with our Service Access team to find out who is best placed to support you and your child.

Better Health Network Paediatric Team

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