

VIRGINIA INFANT & TODDLER SPECIALIST NETWORK

FAIRFAX COUNTY OFFICE FOR CHILDREN

NORTHERN REGIONAL OFFICE

"Achieving Excellence in Early Care"

Healthy From The Start

Eating Strategies That Nurture Young Children



Fairfax County

O **F** **C** Office for Children

Meals Are More Than Food

- Feeding children is one of a child care professional's most important jobs.
- It is how we help the children in our care grow healthy and strong.
- But ... meal time is about much more than food.



Meal and snack times provide teachers and caregivers with an opportunity to help young children...

- Trust that others will care for them.
- Learn healthy eating habits.
- Feel important and loved.
- Feel understood and respected.
- Feel good about their bodies.
- Develop self-help and self-regulation skills.



- Eating is one of the hardest skills that a baby has to learn.
- Food has many components including how it:



- **Looks**
- **Smells**
- **Feels**
- **Tastes**

- Feeding is a shared responsibility.
 - The caregiver is responsible for what food the child is offered.
 - The child is responsible for how much he or she eats.



What does food mean to you?

- Culture - including customs, traditions, and beliefs - plays a big part in how you think about food and how you approach meal times.





What does food mean to you?

- Your own childhood experiences can make a difference in how you approach food and food experiences ... how you feel about food.
- Combining your personal experiences **with** knowledge about healthy eating strategies is important.

Video Scenarios

Let's take a look at some videos of children and caregivers engaged in eating/feeding situations.

- Notice the positive interactions and the healthy feeding strategies that you see.
- Be observant of the environment and other factors that influence eating behaviors/habits.
- Take note of cues that the children give to the caregivers related to their feeding needs.

Children's Cues: Ages and Stages

As children grow, they develop various ways to give us clues as to their preferences and their needs related to feeding, eating, and food.

- Some of these cues include:
 - Turning toward or away from the bottle.
 - Crying when hungry.
 - Opening mouth in anticipation of the food on a spoon.



Children's Cues: Ages and Stages

- Some of these cues include:
 - Picking up food using the palm of the hand and then using fingers (pincher grasp).
 - Using hand and facial gestures to indicate “more,” or “full.”
 - Selecting which foods to eat when a choice is presented.
 - Using words to express thoughts (and needs) related to food.



Help me learn to eat in healthy ways: Birth to 6 months.

- When I cry, comfort me first and then see if I am hungry.
- If I am upset, help me calm down so I can eat.
- Feed me when I show signs of being hungry (e.g. when I cry and then I accept the bottle/food that you give to me).
- When you feed me a bottle, hold me in your arms in a supported position so that my head is above my heart.
- Talk to me in a gentle voice or softly sing to me while I am eating so that I am relaxed.
- Please give me time to eat and avoid rushing me. I may need a break during my feeding to rest or burp and then I'll continue eating.
- Notice when I am full (e.g. when I turn away or push the bottle away) so that we can transition from feeding to something else.



What the child is learning.

- That he is important to you.
- To trust that you will meet his needs.
- That he can communicate and be understood.
- That adults are listening to him and responding to his cues.
- To calm himself with the help of an adult.
- To trust his body's signals that tell him when he is hungry or full.



Help me learn to eat in healthy ways: 6 to 12 months.

- Create family style meal times with opportunities for social interaction and choices of food items. [I am very interested in the friends around me; this helps me build relationships with those who care for me.]
- Start letting me use a high chair (but please take me out when I am finished eating).
- Provide safe food that I can eat with my fingers such as soft, mashed food that I can pick up myself.
- Start letting me eat semi-solid food from a safe spoon. I need to learn how to push food from the front of my mouth to the back and develop chewing skills.
- Give me the opportunity to drink liquid from a cup. I can hold the handle myself and may spill a little as I'm practicing (so please be patient with me).



What the child is learning.

- To feed herself.
- That food has different tastes, textures, and smells ... some I like and some I don't like. If I don't like it, please understand that I don't want to eat it.
- To decide how much to eat.
 - That eating and meal times are relaxed, fun, and feel good.
 - Regularly scheduled meal and snack times help me develop a positive attitude about eating.



Help me learn to eat in healthy ways: 12 to 24 months.

- Offer 3 to 4 healthy choices during meal times. Offer 2 to 3 healthy snacks each day.
- Offer food that can be easily picked up using the fingers (safe foods only, please).
- Offer foods that can be chewed and swallowed easily.
- Provide food in the right size so the food is safe (e.g. cut grapes into quarters, shredded cheese, steamed carrots, a small amount of milk/juice in a sippy cup that has a lid).
- Avoid foods that are choking hazards (e.g. whole grapes, hard carrots, popcorn, nuts, hot dogs, marshmallows, and more).
- Provide child-size, safe utensils.
- Help the child with utensils if the child becomes frustrated or the challenge is too great.
- Make meal times enjoyable and relaxed...a time for connecting with each other. Avoid rushing, avoid tension, avoid forcing the child to eat.
- Let the child set the pace.



What the child is learning.

- To do things for herself.
- To ask for help, when needed. That help will be available, when needed.
- That I can try new foods and I don't have to eat them if I don't like them.
- That adults will pay attention and respect me when I communicate with them (using words, signs, and gestures).
- That I am important and my needs and feelings matter to the adults who care for me.



Help me learn to eat in healthy ways: 24 to 36 months.

- Continue to offer 3 to 4 healthy choices during meal times.
- Continue to offer 2 to 3 healthy snacks each day.
- Let the child help make decisions about what to prepare for meals and snacks.
- Avoid foods that are choking hazards (e.g. whole grapes, hard carrots, popcorn, nuts, hot dogs, marshmallows, and more).
- Continue to provide child-size, safe utensils - appropriate for 2 to 3 year olds.
- Encourage your child to talk with you during meal times - create a relaxed social environment that is friendly and respectful.
- Offer simple tasks like putting the bowls or napkins on the table.
- Allow the child to help prepare the food (e.g. tearing lettuce, adding shredded cheese to the top of the casserole, mixing the pancake batter).
- Allow the child to help clean-up after eating. Children enjoy scrubbing plastic plates, cups, and bowls in warm, sudsy water.



What the child is learning.

- That I know when I am hungry and when I am not hungry.
- That I know my own body (I know when to eat and when not to eat).
- That I can make healthy food choices because I watch the adults around me eating healthy food.
- That I can try foods that I have never seen, smelled, or tasted before.
- New foods have new names ... I get to learn new words.
- That I can be helpful and I am an important part of my classroom, my child care setting, and my home.
- That I am capable.
- That helping others feels good.



The Link Between Brain Development and Nutrition

- Water is very important in a child's diet.
- Fat is essential in a child's diet.
- Avoid dyes, additives, and similar items.



Water and the Brain

- The brain is 78% water and very sensitive to dehydration.
- Offering water to young children helps them develop the habit of seeking water rather than sugary or high calorie drinks when they are thirsty.
- Water should be available to children throughout the day, both indoors and out.



How much water does a child need?

Birth to 6 Months

- Children who are exclusively nursed or drinking formula generally do not need additional water.
- Pediatricians will sometimes recommend an electrolyte-enhanced water (such as Pedialyte) if a baby is ill and in danger of becoming dehydrated.

6 Months - 3 Years

- Once children begin to eat solid food, water can be added to their diet.
- A child's weight divided by 3 equals the number of ounces of water recommended daily.

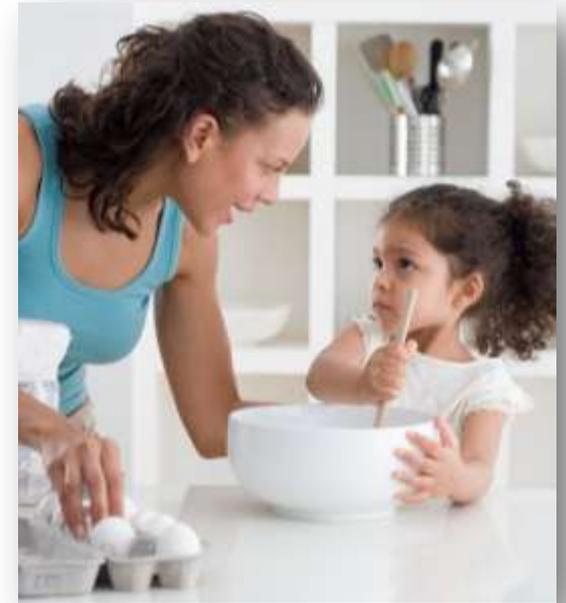
For example, a 30 pound child should be drinking 10 ounces of water per day.
- It is better to drink small amounts of water throughout the day rather than drinking a large quantity at one time.

The Role of Fat in Brain Development

- **Fat** in a child's diet is used to produce **myelin**.
- **Myelin** is a fatty substance that coats the axons of brain cells.
- **Myelin** protects neurons from damage and speeds up the signals between brain cells.
 - ❖ From birth to age 1, 50% of a child's diet should come from fat.
 - ❖ From 1 to 2 years of age, 35% of a child's diet should come from fat.
 - ❖ After 2 years of age, 30% of a child's diet should come from fat.

Healthy Sources of Fat in a Child's Diet

- Formula or Breast Milk
- Yogurt
- Cheese
- Eggs (Fortified with Omega 3)
- Lean Meat
- Avocado
- Food Prepared with Canola or Olive Oil
- Peanut Butter (if no allergies)



Avoid/Reduce Use of Non-natural Foods for Healthy Brains

- Foods containing artificial dyes, such as ...

- Fruit punches and drinks.
- Brightly colored cereals (add color by adding fruit).
- Fruit snacks.
- Brightly colored yogurt, icings, candy.



- Foods with artificial sweeteners, such as ...

- Diet soda/drinks (drink fruit juice instead).
- “Light” or sugar-free foods - yogurt, ice cream, cookies or snacks.



Respecting Children's Eating Preferences

Children have different reactions to food and the process of eating as well as varying needs.

- Being aware of and respectful of children's preferences and needs is the first step in creating successful and positive eating experiences.
 - Planning calm, relaxed environments for meals and snacks will provide children with opportunities to enjoy experiences associated with food ... and will allow children to be integral partners in the eating process.



Respecting Children's Eating Preferences

Each child is unique and cannot be compared to another child.

- Children are born with varying weights and body types.
- Some children grow faster than others.
- Some children need more food than others.
- Some children need to eat more often than others.
- Some children have very specific food preferences while others don't.



Respecting Children's Eating Preferences

Just as we plan for children to be successful in other learning experiences, we can plan for children to be successful while engaging in meal and snack times.

- Some children are sensitive to the taste and smell of food or the way it feels in their mouth - the texture.
- Some children are less likely to try new things based on their temperament - their individual way of approaching the world.
- Some children only want to eat food if they can feed themselves.
- Some children lack appropriate enzymes to break down food and cannot eat or swallow certain foods very easily.



Respecting Children's Eating Preferences

- Some children are very active and may not be able to sit for very long.
- Some children have medical issues (e.g. low muscle tone, narrow esophagus, sensitive gag reflex) that may make it hard for them to swallow.
- Some children may have difficulties with acid reflux or other digestive challenges.
- Some children may have other difficulties related to eating and may be receiving medical treatment.



Respecting Children's Eating Preferences

Depending on the child's needs and/or preferences, there may be strategies that can help children be successful.

- Gently offer new foods. Place new foods next to the foods you know the child likes.
- Offer (safe) finger foods so that children can explore the food and eat it independently.
- Keep healthy foods available and make water accessible so children's nutritional needs are met.



Respecting Children's Eating Preferences

- Eat outdoors (have a picnic) when the weather allows.
 - Children are often more excited (and willing) to try new foods in a new environment or when there is something special to talk about.
- Allow the children to be part of the cooking, preparation, and clean-up process.
- Keep foods separate so the children can see what each food is rather than mixing foods in things like casseroles or salads.
- Role model healthy eating and avoid eating or preparing unhealthy food in front of children.
- Eat with the children whenever possible.



Create Respectful and Joyful Meal Time Experiences



Read Your Child's Signals/Cues

- Babies and young children know when they are hungry or full.
- Babies have their own signals.



- Sometimes the same signal can have more than one meaning.
- Toddlers have signals, too.

What to Avoid

- **Avoid** forcing a child to eat.
- **Avoid** nagging (constant reminders) or begging.
- **Avoid** making deals with a child about what and how much to eat.
- **Avoid** negative comments about a child's behavior or food preferences.
- **Avoid** rushing a child to eat quickly.
- **Avoid** telling children to be quiet during meal/snack times.



Healthy Eating Strategies

Meals are about more than food.

- Establish regular meal and snack times with consistent routines.
- Offer 3 to 4 healthy food choices at each meal.



- Offer a healthy snack between meals.
- Limit juice to 4 ounces a day.
- Offer water throughout the day.
- Vary food choices so that children may select from different foods on a regular basis.

Healthy Eating Strategies

Meals are about more than food.

- Allow children to get up and transition to something else when they are finished eating.
- Offer new foods. What is not appealing one day may be appealing another day.



- Turn **off** the television and computers at meal time and encourage conversation.
- If music is playing, keep the volume low so that children can hear each other.
- Eat with the children and role model healthy, happy and respectful eating habits.

For more information related to
Healthy Eating Strategies for
Infants and Toddlers, please
feel free to visit the
Zero to Three website.

www.zerotothree.org

In order to receive a 1-hour certificate for this Webinar, please complete the evaluation form and submit it to Child Development Resources.

