

# Family Mealtime

There are many benefits to taking time for family meals:



**Build relationships.** Eating together helps build a close relationship with parents and children.

It gives everyone in the family a chance to learn more about each other. Parents should talk with their children during mealtimes. This can be a fun time, and it is important for children to have the attention. Turn off the TV, phones, and other screens at mealtime. On a nice day, pack food for a picnic and have your family meal at a nearby park.

**Eat healthier food and save money.** Meals prepared at home are usually healthier and less expensive than meals eaten while dining out. Plan healthy meals before the week starts. Include quick and easy dishes or leftovers for nights that are busy. Throughout the week, include a variety of foods that include fruits; vegetables; whole grains; protein foods such as lean meat, poultry, or beans; and dairy products such as milk, cheese, and yogurt and/or soy products such as soy milk and tofu.

**Learn portion sizes.** Teach children to take small amounts at first during mealtime. Tell them they can get more if they're still hungry. Let children decide how much to eat.

**Develop cooking skills.** Get everyone in on making a meal. Let children help make meals. Younger children can mix ingredients, wash produce, or set the table, while older children can help with measuring ingredients. Everyone can help clean up.

**Practice social skills and eating skills.** Eating together as a family gives children a chance to learn and practice their social skills, table manners, and conversation skills. Parents and older family members should model healthy eating. This can help young children learn what to do. Also, talk about the color, feel, and flavor of foods. It will make foods more appealing to younger children.

**Try new foods.** Offer children new foods, but don't force them to eat them. Children are more likely to enjoy a food and learn independence when it's their choice. Remember that children need many chances to taste new foods to "get used to them."

Here are some routines and tips for family mealtimes with babies and young children:

- For babies who are only breastfed, wait until about 6 months to start solid foods. For other babies, you can begin solid foods at 4 to 6 months of age.
- Wash your baby's and child's hands before mealtime.
- Put your baby into a highchair and secure the strap. As children get older they can be secured into a booster seat. Watch children while they are eating to make sure they are safe.
- Face your baby or child toward you or other family members at the table.
- When babies first start eating foods, you can feed them with a spoon, or they may use their fingers. At 12 months of age, they will quickly get better at using spoons, forks, and cups.
- Children's developmental milestones are related to their ability to eat. Parents can download the CDC's Milestone Tracker App which helps parents track a child's milestones and find out what to do if they are concerned about how their child is developing. Go to [cdc.gov/MilestoneTracker](https://cdc.gov/MilestoneTracker) for more information.



**WIC has nutrition and cooking information on the Internet!**

Go to [WICHealth.org](https://WICHealth.org). Sign up and complete your profile using the **Family ID** on your WIC Verification of Certification card. Click **Begin** and then choose a lesson. There are a wide variety of lesson topics. Also see **Health eKitchen** for new recipes.

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