

# Mealtime Guide

## Setting or Structure

- Your child should eat all meals and snacks when other family members are eating. Ideally, everyone is eating the same foods.
- Get rid of distractions such as TV, cellphones, tablets and toys. You can have soft music playing in the background. Make mealtime a time to socialize with family members.
- Your child should sit in a chair at the table. Be sure it is the right size for your child and it has a footrest. Insist that your child sit upright while eating or drinking.
- Allow your child to eat independently as much as possible.
- Offer to help your child eat if he or she needs it.
- Be consistent. This will help your child learn what to expect at mealtimes.

## Schedule or Routine

- Your child should eat every 2 ½ to 3 hours. This is about 5 to 6 meals and snacks each day.
- Maintain a normal routine for meals and snacks.
- It should take your child about 15 to 30 minutes to eat a meal and about 10 to 15 minutes to eat a snack.
- Encourage your child stay at the table to eat. You can use a timer to help your child understand how long it should take to eat a meal or snack.

- If your child does not stay at the table, gradually work at increasing the time. Each meal and snack should:
  - have a start and end time
  - be served at the table when your child is seated.
- Your child should only eat at mealtimes. Do not allow your child to snack throughout the day.
- Your child can have water at any time of the day.
- Make mealtime a pleasant time.

## Food

- Serve the food in a way that helps your child eat independently. Should your child have finger foods? Can your child eat simple foods with a fork or spoon?
- It is important for your child to be exposed to a wide variety of food, including tastes and textures. Try not to give your child the same food every day.
- At each meal and snack, offer your child at least 1 protein, 1 carbohydrate, and 1 fruit or vegetable. Your child may not eat each food, but this will help him or her tolerate new foods at the table and on his or her plate.
- Describe the food your child is going to eat such as the taste, texture and temperature. If you describe the food, it will be more likely that your child will do better with eating and be more open to trying new or unfamiliar foods.