

Setting up the Environment for Core Routines: Mealtime



- Structure is key: try to use the same time schedule for meals and snacks.
- Engage in sensory diet activities just prior to mealtimes to prepare the body to sit at the table! Activities include heavy work or movement activities, such as building an obstacle course or jumping on a trampoline. Consult your child's OT for more ideas!
- Every meal/snack needs a clear:
 - Beginning (wash hands, child helps set table)
 - Middle (serve food family style and eat)
 - End (child helps clear table and washes up)
- Each meal should include at least 1 protein, 1 starch, and 1 fruit/vegetable.
- Ideally include one child-preferred food plus one semi-preferred food plus one new food.
- Try to average 3 flavors at every meal to build neural pathways for variety in color, taste and texture. Also, try to vary food day-to-day to avoid food jags.
- Provide a "learning" plate for child to spit or place food onto if they can't tolerate a certain food that day. Remind them that tastes change; they may not like it today, but may like it in the future; also praise their efforts in exploring new foods.
- Supportive seating is important. Bodies that are supported don't wiggle or get up as much. The child should be in a seat with foot support and the table height should be halfway between belly button and chest. This can be achieved by placing cushions under child, foot stool under table, even a cardboard box can work as a foot rest.
- Try to limit distractions during mealtimes, such as iPads or TV. Instead, direct the child's attention to the food and make it playful! Present foods in different shapes or as your child's favorite character (e.g. Mickey Mouse).