

Creating Positive Mealtimes

It is important to try and create a pleasant early feeding experience from the beginning of starting solids.

Positive Mealtime Tips

- Feed your baby in a pleasant environment. A highchair with back and foot support helps baby maintain good posture and feel more comfortable, allowing them to sit for longer without becoming squirmy or uncomfortable.
- Allow your baby to explore the food on offer with all their senses – this can get a little messy, but this is all about the food experience – not just the eating!
- Support your baby's interest in self-feeding, using utensils or their hands. This is an important milestone for your baby.
- Talk warmly to your baby during feeding. Respond to their sounds and words and encourage, don't force your baby to eat. By doing this you are creating a safe experience which builds a positive trusting relationship between you and your baby.
- Make your baby's eating experiences part of family meals where possible. Seating your baby facing the other family members creates a social environment and opportunities to learn by observing. It also gives them an opportunity to try foods the family are eating.
- Avoid TV and other screen time during mealtimes. This can interfere with the opportunity for your baby, you and other family



members to interact with each other which is important for your baby's development and in the establishment of healthy eating habits.

Routines

Creating a routine around mealtimes is really helpful and allows your baby to know when to expect to eat. It may take some time to establish meal and feeding routines, however once it happens, it's important to be consistent, as having regular schedules will help your baby set up good habits.

Growth spurts, teething and illness may temporarily disrupt your baby's regular schedule. Try keeping your baby's feeding routines as consistent as possible but be sensitive to their needs during these transition times.

Follow Hunger and Fullness Cues

It's really helpful to follow your baby's hunger and fullness cues (mindful that appetites can change during periods of fast growth or when your baby is feeling sick). Responding to your baby in a prompt and caring way will help develop a healthy relationship with food and healthy eating habits.

Hunger signs

- Opening mouth when the spoon gets near
- Reaching for spoon or food
- Pointing to food
- Getting excited when food is presented
- Expressing desire for specific foods with words, sounds, actions.

Fullness signs

- Shaking head when food presented
- Turning head away from food
- Not opening mouth when spoon is close

Food Refusal

The main goal during the first few weeks of eating solid foods is to allow your baby to practice the new eating skills. These skills are keeping the food in the mouth, working food toward the back of the mouth and swallowing. Babies as young as six months old are able to show they are not interested in the food.

Sometimes your baby may not want to eat much, other days they'll clear the bowl. Follow their cues. Their appetites change from day to day, and usually these changes are nothing to worry about.

Don't give up if your baby refuses a new food, but rather try again at a different time. It can take 15 to 20 tries before a baby learns to like a new food. Babies often make "faces" when trying a new food. This is part of learning and does not always mean they don't like the new food. Keep trying if it's something you think they will eventually like. It's important to try not to react when your baby has this response. Keep calm and reoffer, however it is important not to force-feed your baby. This can make mealtimes stressful, and your baby will not be excited to eat. Save your energy and show your excitement (e.g. clapping, smiling) when he or she tries and eats new foods.

Support

Be sure to talk to the PCH dietitian at every visit about your baby's eating. They can help you make decisions about food choices, how to add calories if needed and ideas for making mealtimes fun. The earlier you ask the better. Good eating habits start at a young age and last a lifetime.

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