

# Creating Mealtime Magic

## A Self-Instructional Manual

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# Introduction

The overall goal of feeding children is for them to be well-nourished and have a positive relationship to food and eating. This can help create a lifelong foundation for health.

Part of your job as a nutrition educator is to counsel parents and caregivers so that they can achieve this very important goal. This manual provides background information so that you can help parents understand what is going on at feeding time and how to deal with it.

As you go through the manual, you will be reminded that as infants and children develop, they relate to food differently. They have new skills to learn at each stage. They have certain “jobs” to accomplish before they can move to the next stage. The young infant needs to become secure and attached to the primary caregiver, while the older infant needs to explore. The 1 and 2 year old must prove to himself and his parents, “I am a separate person from you!” The 3 and 4 year old needs opportunities to practice new skills and get good at them.

Development affects so much of a child’s behavior at mealtime, and yet parents are often unprepared for what goes on at mealtime. You can help them be ready for the challenges of feeding young children. You can help parents see how their child is developing and help them learn what they can do to make mealtime easier. You can help them make their own “Mealtime Magic,” by helping them develop the parenting skills they will need to help their children eat well.

This manual has lots of information and ideas that you can share with parents. When you finish it, you can feel confident about being helpful to parents in this area.

Pleasant mealtimes are important for the whole family. Families develop bonds and trusting relationships at mealtime. You can help parents decrease the stress of mealtime and increase the pleasure. Families need all the glue they can get to hold them together. They need pleasant family mealtimes—and you can help.

Welcome to “Creating Mealtime Magic”!

This material addresses typical behavior in infancy and early childhood. Children with special health needs or whose development is not typical may develop at different rates.

Information from *Bright Futures in Practice: Nutrition\** was excerpted and adapted throughout this manual. Nutrition educators are encouraged to view the entire document (available at [www.brightfutures.org](http://www.brightfutures.org)) for additional information on nutrition. In these materials, as in all *Bright Futures* materials, the word “parent” is used to refer to the adult or adults responsible for the care of the infant or child. The pronouns “his” and “her” are alternated in some sections.

\* Patrick K, Spear B, Holt K, Sofka D, eds. 2002. *Bright Futures in Practice: Nutrition* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Arlington, VA: National Center for Education in Maternal and Child Health and Georgetown University, used with permission.



# 1. Mealtime Magic with Infants

## Understanding Infants

Infancy is a time of the most rapid physical growth and development a person will ever experience. It is amazing how much growth and development happens between birth and the first birthday! The most rapid changes occur in early infancy, between birth and 6 months of age. Growth remains fast throughout the first year, although it slows down gradually as the first birthday approaches. Infants are typically good eaters, because they are growing fast and they are hungry!

Throughout the year, infants are developing a whole range of new behaviors. One thing they are doing is learning how to use the muscles involved in eating, from learning to suck and swallow in the first days of life, to feeding themselves soft table foods by the time they poke a finger into their first birthday cake.

We all know that in order to grow and develop successfully, infants require good nutrition. Many people do not know, however, that full-term infants who are fed appropriately when they are hungry will eat what they need to grow well. They have finely tuned appetites, so that they eat more at some times (like when they are growing fast) and eat less at other times. *Parents can trust their healthy full-term infants to know how much is enough.*

However, feeding during infancy does much more than help infants grow well. It also provides tremendously important opportunities for emotional bonding between parents and infants. The infant's main developmental task in early infancy is to become secure and attached, and much of this bonding happens at feeding time.

## How do infants and parents bond over feeding?

Here is how *Bright Futures in Practice: Nutrition* explains it:

“Feeding is crucial for developing a healthy relationship between parents and infants. A parent’s responsiveness to an infant’s cues of hunger and satiation and the close physical contact during feeding facilitate healthy social and emotional development. During the first year, being fed when hungry helps infants develop the trust that their needs will be met. For optimum development, newborns need to be fed as soon as possible when they express hunger. As they grow older and become more secure in that trust, infants can wait longer for feeding.

Quickly responding to their infant’s cues also strengthens parents’ sense of competence. As they feed their infant, they learn how their actions comfort and satisfy. Over time, parents become more skilled at interpreting their infant’s cues, and they increase their repertoire of successful responses to those cues. Physical contact during feeding enhances communication between the parent and infant because it provides the infant with essential sensory stimulation, including skin and eye contact, and strengthens the psychological bond between the parent and infant. A sense of caring and trust evolves and lays the groundwork for communication patterns throughout life.”

*Bright Futures in Practice: Nutrition,*  
2nd ed, page 26



With such vital things happening at feeding time, it's important for parents to observe their infants for signals of hunger and fullness.

### Mealtime Magic happens when...

#### ■ Parents learn their baby's signals for "I'm hungry" and "I've had enough."

The parent who knows to look for a baby's signals of hunger and fullness will *be* more successful and will *feel* more successful feeding the baby. Feelings of success with feeding are very important for bonding to occur.

One of the first things most parents worry about in the feeding situation is whether their infant is getting enough to eat.

You can reassure parents that healthy, full-term infants know how much is enough. Infants take different amounts of breastmilk or formula at each feeding, especially as newborns. (Their tummies are about the size of golf balls.) As they grow, infants take more breastmilk or formula at each feeding and stay satisfied longer.

Encourage parents to observe their baby and to trust what their baby is signaling about being hungry and full. Babies *do* know when they are hungry and full. Babies take different amounts at feedings because their growth, activity, and digestion changes throughout the day, and from day to day.

#### A baby signals hunger like this:

- Putting a hand to the mouth to suck
- Making sucking movements or rooting movements with the mouth. (Rooting is the reflex that causes the baby to turn to the breast when his cheek is stroked.)

- Holding a tight fist over the stomach
- Making a face like he or she is about to cry

#### A baby signals fullness like this:

After feeding for a while, the baby signals by:

- Spitting out the nipple or food
- Closing the mouth firmly and turning the head away
- Showing interest in things other than eating
- Playing with the nipple or biting it, rather than sucking on it
- Lying quietly and just sucking every once in awhile
- Falling asleep

### Mealtime Magic happens when...

#### ■ Parents make feeding pleasant

##### Feeding works best when the parent:

- Is relaxed. (Infants can tell when parents are tense.)
- Holds the infant at feeding time. (No propping the bottle.)
- Responds fast to the infant's signals of hunger.
- Responds to the infant's signals of how much is enough.
- Doesn't panic at a little spitting up.
- Introduces solid foods calmly, without forcing them.



## Counseling

The trust and bonding that develop at feeding time are as important as the nutrition. Often parents do not value what is happening at feeding time or know how important it is to focus on the baby. Nutrition educators can help parents become aware of why mealtime is special. The following counseling information can help parents relax about feeding and enjoy it as a special time with their baby.

The information is presented by age ranges that reflect the typical developmental stages of infancy. However, feeding should be based on how ready an infant is developmentally, and not on the infant's size or age. All infants are different.

Feeding will also be influenced by the infant's temperament. Infants are born with their own unique temperments and eating styles. Some infants eat fast and others take their time. Some pause often and others do not pause at all. Some infants are relatively easy to feed and others are harder to feed. Every infant is unique.

Colic also complicates feeding in early infancy. The causes of colic are still unknown.

### Feeding at Birth to 4 months

The feeding experience should stimulate all of the infant's senses, in order to produce growth hormones and brain development. If the senses (sight, sound, touch, smell and taste) are not stimulated, growth and brain development can be affected.

Encourage parents to hold the infant physically close during feeding. The parent should be able to look into the infant's eyes.

Parents are encouraged to talk to the infant calmly during feedings without distracting the infant from feeding. This promotes bonding as well as stimulating growth hormones.

Newborns have difficulty making the transition from sleeping to waking and often have trouble staying awake to feed without getting upset. Soothing sounds and a quiet environment can help.

Feeding can be more pleasant if the room is quiet and the parent is relaxed. The feeding position should be comfortable for both the parent and the infant.

Infants may be distracted by lights and noise. A calm, gentle approach, using repetitive movements such as rocking, patting, or stroking, is usually most helpful. Some infants may need to be wrapped snugly in a blanket or fed in a room with less light and noise.

Show the infant lots of love, attention and cuddling, but avoid overstimulation, especially around feeding time. Overstimulation may cause infants to "shut down" emotionally and physically, and to start crying. Crying helps infants block out excessive stimulation.

A little spitting up is normal. It may help to burp the infant several times during a feeding, and to avoid excessive movement soon after a feeding. Burp the infant at natural breaks (for example, midway through or after a feeding). Gently rub or pat the infant's back while holding him against the shoulder and chest, or supporting him in a sitting position on the lap.

If spitting up seems excessive, the parent should observe the infant more carefully for signals that the infant is full, since overfeeding may cause excessive spitting up.

### ***(Feeding at Birth to 4 months, continued)***

Healthy full-term infants know how much to eat. How much they eat depends on the calories they need to grow and be active. Therefore, they eat what they need at any one time. Parents need to learn what their infant does to signal “I’m hungry” and “I’m full.”

Feeding is easier if the infant is fed *before* getting to the last stage of “I’m hungry” signals, which is crying. Calming a crying, hungry infant can be difficult.

Calm the infant before and during eating, as needed, so that the infant experiences eating as a positive, pleasant, anxiety-free experience.

Infants go through “growth spurts.” The first one is usually between 2 and 4 weeks of age. Infants will be especially hungry for a few days due to very fast growth. Parents should be prepared for this, respond to it calmly, and feed when the infant shows signals of hunger.

Growth spurts often make breastfeeding mothers question whether their milk is “any good” or if they have enough. Reassure mothers that the quality of their breastmilk is fine. Breastfeeding more often during growth spurts will increase the mother’s milk supply and satisfy the infant.

Infants should not be put to bed with a propped bottle. Propping the bottle does not promote the bonding or brain development like holding a baby at feeding time does. Propping the bottle also increases the risk of choking, ear infections, and dental caries.

It is normal for infants to drool more at 3 to 4 months of age as their salivary glands become more active.



### **Feeding at 4 to 6 Months**

Infants develop feeding skills at their own rates. If an infant has significant delays in the development of feeding skills, further assessment by a health professional is needed.

The infant must be ready before being introduced to new foods and new textures.

Infants should not be offered food other than breastmilk or infant formula until they can sit with support and have good control of the head and neck, at about 4 to 6 months.

Other signs an infant is ready for solids:

- Infant reaches for things and can hold them
- Infant watches food, waits with an open mouth for food, and then closes mouth over food
- Infant takes cereal off a spoon and can swallow it easily

Up to about 4 or 5 months of age, the infant has a normal reflex that pushes food out of the mouth with the tongue. As long as the infant still has that reflex, wait a while before feeding with the spoon.

Place the infant in a sitting position for spoon feeding. Use a small, shallow baby spoon when offering the infant a new food.

Parents should offer an iron-fortified, single-grain infant cereals (such as rice cereal) as the first solid food, because it is least likely to cause an allergic reaction.

Choose a quiet and relaxed time to begin cereal. Make sure the infant has already had breastmilk or formula. Morning feedings are often best. This is a learning experience for both parent and infant, and

### **(Feeding at 4 to 6 months, continued)**

it helps if both of them are rested and ready for a new experience.

It is important to offer new foods one at a time and observe infants for 7 days or more after a new food is introduced to make sure there is not an allergic reaction (for example, a rash).

Offer fruit juice in a cup, helping the infant drink from it. Offering all juice in a cup teaches cup drinking and reduces the risk of dental caries when the infant gets teeth.

Over time, parents can gradually introduce pureed or soft fruits and vegetables. Iron-fortified infant cereal is recommended.

Infant toys encourage physical activity and the development of skills used in self-feeding. Infants should play with safe, age-appropriate toys such as rattles, stuffed animals, and plastic toys. Moving them from hand to mouth and sucking and gumming them helps infants develop important skills they will use later when they feed themselves.

### **Feeding at 6 to 9 months**

The infant learns to self-feed soft foods during this time, slowly learning how to get food into the mouth with the fingers. These feeding skills are important. Allow extra time for baby to learn these skills.

Offer the infant finger foods (for example, green beans, cereal, crackers) when the infant can eat solid foods. If the infant is grabbing at the spoon during feeding, put finger foods, like crackers, in each hand. This will allow feeding to progress.

Parents can offer store-bought and home-prepared baby food, but infants who can feed themselves soft foods do not need it.

Meats can be added to the infant's meals. However, the meat must be chopped fine and be easy to eat.

Offer all juice in the cup. Help baby drink from the cup.

Infants should not be forced to eat a food they don't like. The food can be offered at a later time. It may take many attempts before an infant accepts a particular food.

Infants who are self-feeding will be messy. Use a bib and put newspaper or plastic under the infant's eating area.

Include the infant at family meals. A highchair allows the infant to be part of the family circle. (The safety belt should be used.)

By 6 months of age, infants become very active and benefit from playing with toys for stacking, shaking, pushing, or dropping. They also benefit from playing with others. Encourage parents to include the infant in family play times.

### **Feeding at 9 to 12 months**

Offer soft, moist foods (for example, mashed potatoes and other cooked vegetables, spaghetti with sauce, rice, tuna, meat loaf) as the infant gradually changes from gumming to chewing foods.

The infant will gain more control over picking up and holding food, and feeding himself small pieces of soft food. From 9 to 12 months, the infant gradually progresses to eating most table foods, cut up fine.

At this age, allow extra time for eating, since the infant will be self-feeding most foods. The infant will get better at using the cup. If the infant is bottle fed, start offering all beverages in the cup so that weaning is easy at about 12 to 14 months.

***(Feeding at 9 to 12 months, continued)***

Any foods that could cause choking should NOT be offered, including small, hard, round foods, like hard candy, mini-marshmallows, popcorn, nuts, seeds, hot dogs, round “coins” of carrot, raisins, whole grapes, and other foods. Peanut butter is also a food children can choke on.

Parents need to be patient and understanding as the infant tries new foods and learns to feed herself. Self-feeding is messy. Putting newspaper or plastic on the floor is a good idea.

Parents and infants should eat together at family meals, if possible. Make meals pleasant, so that meals can be a time for bonding and learning to enjoy food. Infants and children learn how to eat by imitating others. Parents are role models for how to eat and how to behave at mealtime.

Any time the infant is eating, an adult should be present, in case of choking.

Remove distractions (such as toys) and turn off the TV so that the infant can focus on eating.

Infants at this age are explorers. They are learning about foods by playing with them. Let them do this within reason.

A highchair continues to be very useful.

Most 9 to 12 month old infants will be on the same basic eating schedule as the family: breakfast, lunch, and supper.

Instruct parents to give the infant snacks mid-morning, in the afternoon, and at bedtime. Snacks should be nutritious. Suitable snacks might include soft fruits, yogurt, dry cereal such as Cheerios, and crackers. Milk, juice, and water are suitable drinks.



## A Review

What do parents need to do to make mealtimes go well in the first year of life? They need to learn their baby's signals that say "I'm hungry" and "I'm full." They need to feed the infant when the infant is hungry, and feed until the infant seems full. They need to trust the infant to know how much is enough.

Parents also need to provide a pleasant eating environment. This is very important. The bonding that takes place at mealtime is vital for both the parent and the infant. A sense of caring and trust evolves and lays the groundwork for emotional health throughout life.

The young infant's main developmental "job" is to become secure and bonded (attached) with the parent. To make sure this happens, the parent should hold the infant close when breastfeeding or bottle feeding, maintain eye contact, and talk gently with the infant.

In middle infancy (6 to 9 months) and late infancy (9 to 12 months), the infant's main developmental "job" is to explore. At mealtimes, parents should be patient and understanding as the infant tries new foods and learns to feed herself with her fingers. Parents should help the infant drink from a cup, in preparation for weaning. Parents should remove distractions so that the infant stays focused on the food. If the infant does not like a new food, she should not be forced to eat it. The food can be offered at a later time.

By late infancy (9 to 12 months), an infant is usually on the same eating schedule as the family—breakfast, lunch and dinner. If the infant is bottle fed, weaning to the cup starts to take place during this time. As breastfeeding or bottle feeding decline, the infant will need snacks between meals—in mid-morning, in the afternoon, and at bedtime. A high chair helps the infant be a part of the family circle at mealtime. Being a part of family meals helps the infant form close relationships, learn new skills by watching others, and learn about foods.

# Self-Check

## Mealtime Magic with Infants

This is a simple self-check that lets you review the material you have just read. Answering these questions will prepare you for the post-test. The answers are on the next page.



### True or False:

Infants' behaviors at mealtime often reflect their stage of development.	True	False
Becoming secure and bonded is one of the infant's developmental "jobs" in the first months of life.	True	False
The infant at 6 to 12 months has the developmental "job" of exploring.	True	False
Essential bonding between infants and parents takes place at feeding time.	True	False
Infants have built-in appetite mechanisms that tell them when they are hungry and when they are full.	True	False
Parents can trust their healthy full-term infants to know how much is enough at feeding time.	True	False
Infants develop trust when they are routinely fed when they are hungry.	True	False
Infants may signal hunger by putting a hand to the mouth to suck.	True	False
Overfeeding can cause spitting up.	True	False
An infant's appetite may change from day to day.	True	False
Infants going through "growth spurts" may have less appetite.	True	False
Up to about 4 or 5 months of age, infants have a reflex that makes them push food out of their mouths with their tongues.	True	False
Parents should not talk to their infants during feedings.	True	False
It's best if all juice is offered in a cup.	True	False
From 9 to 12 months old, the infant will gradually start to eat most table foods and learn to drink from a cup.	True	False

# Self-Check Answers

## Mealtime Magic with Infants

### True or False:

Infants' behaviors at mealtime often reflect their stage of development.	True
Becoming secure and bonded is one of the infant's developmental "jobs" in the first months of life.	True
The infant at 6 to 12 months has the developmental "job" of exploring.	True
Essential bonding between infants and parents takes place at feeding time.	True
Infants have built-in appetite mechanisms that tell them when they are hungry and when they are full.	True
Parents can trust their healthy full-term infants to know how much is enough at feeding time.	True
Infants develop trust when they are routinely fed when they are hungry.	True
Infants may signal hunger by putting a hand to the mouth to suck.	True
Overfeeding can cause spitting up.	True
An infant's appetite may change from day to day.	True
Infants going through "growth spurts" may have less appetite.	False
Up to about 4 or 5 months of age, infants have a reflex that makes them push food out of their mouths with their tongues.	True
Parents should not talk to their infants during feedings.	False
It's best if all juice is offered in a cup.	True
From 9 to 12 months old, the infant will gradually start to eat most table foods and learn to drink from a cup.	True

## 2. Mealtime Magic with Toddlers

### Understanding Toddlers

Toddlers, at ages 1 and 2, have the developmental “job” of proving to themselves and their parents that they are separate people from their parents. This growing independence is part of a strong drive within a child to develop and learn.

Because toddlers have this strong drive to be independent, many toddler behaviors are predictable, including their eating behaviors.

#### **Toddlers express their desire to be independent in many ways at meals and snacks:**

- They start saying “no” a lot—even when they mean “yes” sometimes!
- They want to do things themselves.
- They like to make choices.
- They often refuse to eat, and often refuse to eat foods they liked a few days ago.
- They don’t like to sit down to eat.
- They don’t want to chew meat. It takes too much work.
- They enjoy helping but can’t be left alone.
- They are energetic, curious, and cannot assess danger—and, at the same time, they do not want to be told what to do.
- They want to do things *their way*—but they need limits to feel secure.
- They are not patient. Whatever they want, they want it *now!*



Many toddler behaviors are predictable, but what is *unpredictable* is the amount and types of foods toddlers will eat, from meal to meal and from day to day. Most toddlers do not eat a wide variety of foods. It is more common that a toddler will eat only a few foods. You can reassure parents that children will eat more foods when they are 3 and 4 years old.

You can also reassure parents that even the pickiest toddlers usually eat enough food to meet their nutrition needs, *if the foods they are offered are nutritious.*

Toddlers aren’t growing fast and they don’t eat much. Their calorie intake typically balances out over a day or two, although the amount eaten at each meal may vary greatly.

Toddlers should be offered food every 2 or 3 hours, in a daily routine of scheduled meals and snacks.

Healthy snacks are very important for toddlers because they eat such small amounts at mealtimes. Suitable snacks for toddlers are the same foods that might be offered at meals, such as fruits, cheese, bread, crackers and yogurt.

Parents often worry about how much their picky toddler eats. You can reassure them that *the best indicator of an adequate diet is the toddler’s growth--not how much the child eats.*

Here is what *Bright Futures in Practice: Nutrition* has to say about toddlers: <sup>1</sup>

“Toddlers’ growth rates decrease during early childhood; therefore, their energy needs decrease. Despite these changes, toddlers will consume a variety of foods if parents continue to serve developmentally

appropriate healthy meals and snacks. To encourage toddlers to establish healthy eating behaviors, parents need to provide a structured, but pleasant, mealtime environment and serve as role models by eating a variety of foods. Parents are responsible for what, when, and where the toddler eats; toddlers are responsible for whether to eat and how much.”

## Counseling

Mealtimes with toddlers can be very challenging because toddlers need to learn to feed themselves. Toddlers learn by doing. Parents can help toddlers by staying aware of developing skills and giving the toddler a chance to “do it myself!” even if it is messy. Encouragement, support, and praise for desirable behaviors also help the toddler learn and develop self-esteem.

Here is some guidance that can help parents minimize the challenges, keep feeding in perspective, and set up an environment for “Mealtime Magic.”

### Mealtime Magic happens when...

#### ■ Parents know what to expect

Parents need to have realistic expectations of what their toddler can do. When it comes to eating, parents can expect that one and two year olds may:

- Have very little appetite.
- Eat tiny amounts at meals and snacks.
- Eat only one or two foods at a meal.
- Eat only what tastes good.
- Show no interest in eating new foods.
- Refuse to eat foods based solely on how they *look*.

- Prefer to drink rather than eat.
- Avoid foods they have to chew, like meat.
- Dislike many vegetables.
- Prefer foods with mild flavors.
- Want foods that others are eating.
- Have strong likes and dislikes.
- Make a mess and spill often.
- Be easily distracted at mealtime.
- Take a long time to eat.

#### Also:

- Expect toddlers to use food to try to get some control. The toddler is trying to become separate from the parents. Expect some battles and the occasional tantrum. Try not to be too strict or too easy.
- Expect toddlers to want candy, chips and sweet drinks instead of healthy food and milk. Parents must set limits and make rules. It’s part of the parent’s job.
- Expect toddlers to be almost too busy to eat. Expect them to want to run around with their food. To help them sit down for meals, parents can do things to slow them down before meals, like reading a story, having a quiet time, or sitting at the table with a game or puzzle.
- Expect toddlers to go on food jags. These are times when a child only wants to eat a particular food and refuses all other foods. Going along with a food jag is usually harmless--but don’t make something special for your child to eat if he or she refuses a meal.
- Expect toddlers to eat more when they are fully weaned from the bottle.

Sipping on bottles or sippy cups carried around all day can spoil the appetite.

- Expect most toddlers to eat a greater amount of food early in the day and not as much in the evening.
- Expect toddlers to eat in response to their internal appetite. If they are not hungry, they probably will not eat.
- Expect a toddler to be learning constantly, especially by imitating the other members of the family. Mealtime teaches the toddler about many things, including what behaviors are acceptable when people eat together. Praise for desirable behaviors increases the chance of the child repeating those behaviors and also build the toddler's self-esteem.

**Expect children this age to eat better:**

- when they are hungry.
- when they are allowed to feed themselves.
- when they can make choices.
- when they are not forced to eat.
- when they are not distracted by toys or TV.



**Mealtime Magic happens when...**

**■ Parents and children share responsibilities at mealtime**

Parenting at mealtime is not easy. So much goes on at mealtime that requires parenting skills.

Some important parenting skills include:

- Giving positive, loving attention to the child, including paying attention to new skills and praising desirable behavior. (Behavior that gets attention tends to be repeated.)
- Ignoring or downplaying the response to less desirable behavior, like whiny behavior or food refusal. (Ignoring behavior tends to make it fade away.)
- Being sensitive to the child's needs, such as allowing enough time to eat; offering small portions and allowing the child to ask for more; allowing the child to decide how much to eat; making foods easy to eat.
- Setting limits, such as being clear and consistent about behaviors are acceptable at mealtime and which are not; feeding at regular meals and snacks, rather than on demand; limiting snacks and drinks close to mealtime; insisting that children sit down to eat meals and snacks.

Letting the child share in responsibilities at mealtime is one way the parent can be sensitive to the child's needs, set limits, and be consistent. Meals can be very stressful when a parent feels responsible for things out of their control, such as *how much* a child eats. The following division of responsibility at mealtime helps decrease stress for both the parent and the child, as it makes it clear that the parent is *not* responsible for *making* the child eat.

Unfortunately, many parents think that they are *supposed* to make their child eat. However, this just creates fights over food and makes family meals a battle. Remind parents that mealtimes are too important to spend fighting about food.

**Parents are responsible for *what, when, and where* the child eats.<sup>2</sup>**

- **What:** The parent is responsible for deciding what foods will be served at a meal or snack. Therefore, the parent should *not* ask the child, “What do you want to eat?” The parent decides the menu or the parent can give the child choices that are acceptable to the parent, like, “Do you want peas or green beans?” To ensure that the child’s nutrition needs are met, parents need to buy and prepare a variety of healthy foods and make them easy for the child to eat.
- **When:** Parents are responsible for serving meals and snacks at regular times and making sure that children come to the table. Young children need breakfast, lunch, supper, and nutritious snacks mid-way between meals. They act and feel best when they have a routine of meals and snacks around the same time every day. Routines make children feel secure. A predictable routine also makes it easier for parents to say, “If you don’t eat now, you won’t eat again until snack time, you know.” A routine helps the parent avoid the situation of a child who asks for food constantly. A daily routine of meals and snacks can help assure that a child is actually hungry at mealtime. Snacks should not be offered too close to mealtime because they can spoil a child’s appetite.
- **Where:** Parents are responsible for deciding where the child eats. The best place is usually at a table, away from distractions like the television and toys. Parents are encouraged to set some easily understood rules and limits about behavior at the table. (Such as: “Come to table and visit with us even if you’re not going to eat.” “We don’t drop food on the floor.” “We take small bites.” “We don’t chew and talk at the same time.”)

**Children are responsible for deciding *whether to eat and how much to eat.*<sup>2</sup>**

- **Whether to eat:** Children can decide whether to eat a particular food or whether to eat at all. Forcing a toddler to eat a food or forcing them to eat because it’s mealtime does not lead to pleasant mealtimes. Children often say “I’m not hungry” and refuse to eat at mealtime. Parents should stay calm if their child is not hungry. Insisting that the child come to the table and join the rest of the family is a good rule, however. The child who refuses to eat can eat again at the next scheduled snack time. Food refusal will happen more often if the child knows they can ask for and get a cookie or some other food soon after the meal is over. If a child is often not hungry at mealtime, it may be due to snacks and drinks too close to mealtime.
- **How much to eat:** Toddlers do not eat much. They should not be pressured to eat more than they want. They also do not eat according to the Food Guide Pyramid, since they often eat just one or two foods at a meal. A child eats better if he or she is hungry at mealtime. Parents are advised not to let the child drink or snack too close to mealtime. Sweet drinks, juice, and milk can spoil the appetite, but water is an acceptable drink before meals. If the child is hungry before the meal is prepared, parents are encouraged to feed the child a part of the meal, such as pieces of fruit, vegetables, or bread.

## Mealtime Magic happens when...

### ■ Parents make eating easy

Using child-size spoons and cups, and using plates and bowls with steep sides (to push food against) can make eating easier for the toddler. Using plastic dinnerware can help parents relax. Toddlers often have their favorite dinnerware.

Toddlers like to feed themselves, often with their fingers and sometimes with a spoon. Foods should be cut in small, bite-sized pieces to make them easy and safe for the toddler to eat.

Young toddlers like soft foods because they are easy to eat. As they learn to eat foods with more texture, they will eat a wider variety of foods.

Toddlers usually prefer foods that are not a hot temperature and foods that with mild flavors. However, every child is different.

Toddlers usually do not like meats that are dry and hard to chew. Serve finely chopped meat with moist foods. For instance, serve roast beef, chopped fine, with some mashed potatoes.

Toddlers have sensitive taste buds. Vegetables are not favorite foods because many have strong flavors when cooked. Parents can be assured that their child will eat a wider variety of foods at ages 3 and 4. Parents are encouraged to continue to serve a variety of vegetables to the rest of the family and to continue offering them to the toddler.

Toddlers are at high risk for choking. *No foods that could cause choking should be offered.* This includes hard foods and round foods, like hard candy, mini-marshmallows, popcorn, nuts, seeds, hot dogs, round “coins” of carrot, raisins, whole grapes, and other foods. Peanut butter is also a food

children can choke on. It should never be given by the spoonful. After the second birthday, it can be spread thinly on bread or crackers.

A child should always sit while eating. Eating while walking or running may cause choking. Getting too excited while eating may also cause choking.

Mealtime is easier when serving sizes are small. Children may get overwhelmed when serving sizes are too large. Parents can offer small portions of food (for example, 1 or 2 tablespoons) and let the child ask for more if desired. Older toddlers can be taught to serve themselves the amount they want to eat.

Make eating easier by showing a child how to do things. Showing a child how to eat can be more effective than telling them how to eat. For example, “Hold your cup like this. It will be easier to drink from.”

### Here are some rules that can cut down on choking. They also teach good table manners.

- We sit down to eat. We don't walk or run with food in our mouths.
- We don't chew and talk at the same time.
- We take small bites.
- We chew our food well.
- We swallow our food before we have a drink.





## Mealtime Magic happens when...

### ■ Parents make meals pleasant

Decreasing stress at mealtimes helps make meals a more pleasant experience. When parents know that they are doing their job—the *what*, *when*, and *where* of feeding—they can relax and let their child do his or her job.

Meals and snacks are important social times for children. Parents should turn off the television and make mealtime special.

Encourage parents to talk about their day or about the foods being eaten. Setting rules about behavior at mealtimes should be done calmly and firmly. With toddlers, the fewer rules the better. Be consistent in enforcing rules. Children this age need to hear rules many times before they learn them.

Toddlers want attention at meals, especially if they have been away from their parents all day. Make sure children are getting positive attention. Otherwise, they may act up to get any kind of attention they can.

Children eat better when they are actually hungry. Snacks or drinks (such as milk or juice) too close to meals can spoil the appetite.

Discourage letting the toddler walk around all day with a bottle or sippy-cup, sipping juice or milk. This can cause tooth decay. Toddlers on the bottle should be weaned.

A high chair can help a child eat comfortably and also keeps the toddler in one place at mealtime. Eating family style at a table is encouraged.

Children should not be rushed at mealtime because learning new skills and trying new foods takes time. When toddlers have stopped eating, however, and are just

playing with their food, it's probably time for the meal to end.

Children like to serve themselves. It helps them feel independent and learn to make choices.

Parents need to be patient and understanding if the toddler makes a mess while he learns to feed himself. Parents can help the toddler feel successful at mastering new eating skills, like cup drinking and using the spoon.

Bibs can help make meals less messy. Parents can put newspaper or an old shower curtain under the toddler's eating area. Keeping a sponge nearby for spills can be helpful.

Parents can encourage the child to eat new foods by offering very small portions, perhaps just a bite at first.

Children often must be exposed to a new food many times before accepting it. They may need to look at the new food, touch it, smell it, feel it, and taste it--perhaps as many as 15 to 20 times--before they accept it.<sup>3,4</sup>

Children sometimes eat new foods better when they are relaxed, not tired, and when the new food is served along with a favorite food. Trying new foods is easier for children if they are sure that they will not be forced to eat foods they do not like. If a child does not like the taste of a food, let her take the new food out of her mouth politely.

Parents should *not* use foods to reward, bribe, or punish children, or to calm, comfort, or entertain them. Using food as a reward or punishment trains the child to see food as something different than an enjoyable way to satisfy hunger. If food is misused by adults, it may become a way for the child to deal with emotional stress. This can distort the child's relationship to

food and result in eating problems in childhood and later in life.

Children this age like to make choices. Being able to make choices gives a sense of some control and helps make a child cooperative. Parents can encourage their child to make choices between two alternatives that are acceptable to the parent. Children enjoy being offered choices like, “Do you want to use your blue cup or your red one?” or “Do you want your sandwich cut in triangles or in squares?” or “Do you want your soup in a bowl or in a mug?” Choices like this work like magic with toddlers.

It’s typical for toddlers to test limits by asking for certain foods, refusing other foods, and by throwing tantrums to get their way. Nutrition educators can reassure parents that this is normal, predictable behavior at this age.

Tantrums are common at this age because toddlers are easily overwhelmed with frustration. Ignoring tantrums may work best, while making sure a child does not hurt himself. Giving in to the child’s reason for the tantrum is not a good idea because then tantrums may become the route the toddler uses to get his or her way.<sup>5</sup>

Parents should attempt to deal calmly with food refusal. Food refusal should not make a parent jump up to fix something different. Parents should always try to serve at least one food at a meal that the child will eat, like milk, bread, or fruit, so that the child has something to eat if other foods are refused.

Children will be more likely to refuse food served at mealtime if they know they can get a more desirable food after the meal.

## Mealtime Magic happens when...

### ■ Parents are good role models

An adult should eat with a toddler whenever possible--for companionship, for bonding, to prevent choking, to be a role model, and to be a teacher.

The parent is a child’s first and best teacher. Toddlers learn through observation and imitation, constantly watching the parent and learning what to do by watching what the parent does. Parents are positive role models when they offer new foods to the child by eating these foods themselves; when they eat until they are full and then stop; when they relax and enjoy their food; and when they use good table manners.

Toddlers learn many things at family mealtimes. They learn how parents expect them to eat by what parents do, what they say, and by what their rules are. They also learn about foods. They learn new skills and they learn how to act at the table, talking and enjoying themselves with their families. They learn that they belong in the family circle.

Toddlers like to “help” in the kitchen, although they do not yet have many skills and must be watched carefully. The parent can let the toddler participate in easy tasks, like adding vegetables to a salad, sprinkling cheese on a casserole, and putting things in the trash.

To help a child develop a good body image, parents should not criticize their own size or shape, or anyone else’s. It is especially important not to criticize the child’s shape or size.

## A Review

Toddlers, at age 1 and 2, are very busy little people, determined to do things their own way. Their main “job” developmentally is to prove to themselves and their parents “I am a separate person from you!” This can present many challenges to parents at mealtimes. However, toddlers do become easier to feed at ages 3 and 4.

Toddlers don’t eat much and they don’t eat according to the Food Guide Pyramid. This often makes parents panic and feel they are not doing their job well. Parents need reassurance that most toddler eating “problems” are actually predictable. Toddlers grow more slowly than they did as infants and their appetites reflect this. The best indicator of an adequate diet is the toddler’s growth, not how much the child eats.

### **Toddlers typically:**

- become picky eaters
- refuse to eat certain foods
- sometimes refuse to eat at all
- eat only one or two foods at a meal

Parents do not need to take this personally or think that it reflects on their parenting skills. They need to stay as calm and as relaxed as possible, include the toddler in family meals, not force the child to eat, and continue to offer the whole family a variety of healthy foods—even if the toddler won’t eat many of them.

A nutrition educator can help parents know what behaviors to expect from toddlers and can help parents create pleasant mealtimes.

### **“Mealtime Magic” happens when...**

- parents know what behaviors to expect
- parents and children share responsibilities at mealtime
- parents make eating easy
- parents make mealtime pleasant
- parents are good role models


There are fewer mealtime battles if parents observe a division of responsibility around eating.<sup>1</sup> Parents are responsible for *what*, *when*, and *where* the child eats. Children are responsible for deciding *whether to eat* and *how much* to eat.

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# Self-Check

## Mealtime Magic with Toddlers

This is a simple self-check that lets you review the material you have just read. Answering these questions will prepare you for the post-test. The answers are on the next page.
 

**True or False:**

Toddlers' behaviors at mealtime often reflect their stage of development.	True	False
Toddlers are busy proving to themselves and their parents that they are separate people.	True	False
Toddlers don't eat as much as they did as infants because they are not growing as fast.	True	False
Toddlers typically eat only one or two foods at a meal.	True	False
Parents should not force toddlers to eat foods they do not like.	True	False
It may take as many as 15 to 20 exposures to a new food before a child accepts it.	True	False
The pickiest toddlers usually eat enough food to meet their nutritional needs if the foods they are offered are nutritious.	True	False
The best indicator of an adequate diet is the toddler's growth--not how much the toddler eats.	True	False
Parents are responsible for <i>what</i> foods are offered, and <i>when</i> and <i>where</i> the child eats.	True	False
Children are responsible for deciding <i>whether to eat</i> and <i>how much</i> to eat.	True	False
Using food to bribe a child can distort the child's relationship to food.	True	False
Including the toddler in family meals is important.	True	False
Parents can be positive role models by eating new foods themselves.	True	False
To help children develop a good body image, parents should not criticize their own size or shape, or anyone else's.	True	False

# Self-Check Answers

## Mealtime Magic with Toddlers

### True or False:

- Toddlers' behaviors at mealtime often reflect their stage of development. True
- Toddlers are busy proving to themselves and their parents that they are separate people. True
- Toddlers don't eat as much as they did as infants because they are not growing as fast. True
- Toddlers typically eat only one or two foods at a meal. True
- Parents should not force toddlers to eat foods they do not like. True
- It may take as many as 15 to 20 exposures to a new food before a child accepts it. True
- The pickiest toddlers usually eat enough food to meet their nutritional needs if the foods they are offered are nutritious. True
- The best indicator of an adequate diet is the toddler's growth--not how much the toddler eats. True
- Parents are responsible for *what* foods are offered, and *when* and *where* the child eats. True
- Children are responsible for deciding *whether to eat* and *how much* to eat. True
- Using food to bribe a child can distort the child's relationship to food. True
- Including the toddler in family meals is important. True
- Parents can be positive role models by eating new foods themselves. True
- To help children develop a good body image, parents should not criticize their own size or shape, or anyone else's. True

## 3. Mealtime Magic with Children

### Understanding 3 and 4 year olds

At ages 3 and 4, children are developing many new skills. In fact, their main developmental “jobs” now are to learn new skills and practice them. Although in the toddler period, they said “I can do it!” and tried hard, at ages 3 and 4, they really *can* do it, and they are proud of it. They enjoy getting praised for their new skills. They feel very good about what they have learned to do. They are starting to feel competent.

Like toddlers, 3 year olds enjoy making choices and they respond better to choices than to demands. They want to be included in everything. They have very definite likes and dislikes and insist on the “right” way to do things. They are usually able to feed themselves pretty well with a spoon and may be learning to eat with a fork. They become more interested in trying new foods, and they are easier to be with at the table than they were as toddlers.

The 4 year old is more mature and has a longer attention span. He or she is more willing to experience new situations and try new foods. The 4 year old likes approval and likes to show off. He or she understands rules and follows them most of the time.

Around age 3 or 4, children become more curious about foods. They may still be reluctant to try them, however—especially cooked vegetables, which often have strong flavors for their sensitive taste buds. Sometimes 3 and 4 year olds still refuse to eat at all. Like toddlers, they do not eat well if they are forced to eat foods they do not like.

“Hands on” experiences with food can help make children more interested in eating it, such as helping grow the food, choosing the food at the store, or helping prepare it at home. Children this age can help in the kitchen with simple tasks like measuring, mixing, and helping to set the table. Children become familiar with foods by drawing pictures of them, singing about them, and talking about their shape, color, and taste.

Like infants and toddlers, children ages 3 and 4 will eat in response to their internal appetite. If they are not hungry, they probably will not eat. Snacks and drinks too close to meals will spoil their appetite. Their calorie intake typically balances out over a day or two, although the amount eaten at each meal may vary greatly.

### Counseling

***The best indicator of an adequate diet is the child's growth--not how much the child eats.***

You can help parents relax about *how much* the child eats, and focus instead on helping the child learn to be successful with eating, and on making mealtimes pleasant. A pleasant and supportive eating environment helps the child eat, learn, and develop a positive relationship with food. A positive, healthy relationship with food and eating will contribute to overall wellbeing for the child's entire lifetime.

You can share the following information with parents. Some of the points are the same as ones made in the toddler chapter. They are mentioned again here to reinforce their importance.

## Mealtime Magic happens when...

### ■ Parents know what to expect

#### Expect that 3 and 4 year olds will:

- Progress from using a spoon to using a fork.
- Be able to hold a cup by its handle.
- Spill sometimes.
- Have an increased interest in foods.
- Request favorite foods.
- Continue to have food jags (when they only want to eat a particular food).
- Like foods in various shapes and colors.
- Like to imitate the cook.
- Be influenced by TV.

#### Expect that 4 year olds will:

- Be more interested in talking than in eating.
- Be interested in where food comes from.
- Be influenced by how and what other children are eating.

#### Expect 3 and 4 year olds to eat better:

- When they are hungry at mealtime.
- When they eat with others, so they can talk!
- When they can show off their new eating skills.
- When they are not forced to eat.
- When they are not distracted by toys or TV.

### Expect 3 and 4 year olds to continue to prefer familiar foods:

- They may still not want to try new foods, but they will eat a variety of foods as they get older.
- They may like vegetables raw, since cooking brings out strong flavors.
- They may eat a new food only after it has been offered many times.

## Mealtime Magic happens when...

### ■ Parents and children share responsibilities at mealtime

Mealtimes still go better when parents are responsible for certain tasks and children are responsible for other tasks. Parents are responsible for *what, when, and where* the child eats. Children are responsible for deciding *whether* to eat and *how much* to eat.<sup>1</sup>

Parents should not pressure the child to eat certain foods or to eat more than he or she wants. Pressuring children to eat backfires. They eat better when they are supported and encouraged at mealtime but not pressured. It is important for all of us to eat until we feel full and then stop. This is the basis of maintaining a healthy weight in childhood, adolescence, and adulthood.

Food refusal should not make a parent jump up to fix something special. Parents should always try to serve at least one food at a meal that the child will eat, like milk, bread, or fruit, so that the child has something to eat if other foods are refused.

Children will be more likely to refuse food served at mealtime if they know they can get a more desirable food after the meal.

## Mealtime Magic happens when...

### ■ Parents make eating easy

Plates and bowls with steep sides (to push food against) continue to make eating easier. Children this age often have their favorite dinnerware.

Foods that may have caused choking in the toddler stage can now be offered, if they are made easy and safe to eat. Cut hot dogs in quarters lengthwise and then into small pieces. Cut whole grapes in half lengthwise. Chop nuts finely. Chop raw carrots finely or into thin strips. Spread peanut butter thinly on crackers or bread.

An adult should still eat with a child or, if that is not possible, at least stay with the child while the child eats, to provide companionship and to prevent choking. Children should sit while eating.

Mealtime is easier when serving sizes are small. Children may get overwhelmed when serving sizes are too large. Children can be taught to serve themselves the amount they want to eat or parents can offer small portions of food (for example, 3 or 4 tablespoons) and let the child ask for more if desired.

## Mealtime Magic happens when...

### ■ Parents make meals pleasant

Creating “Mealtime Magic” has a lot to do with how pleasant parents can make mealtimes. By the time a child is age 3 and 4, family meals often become more pleasant naturally, because the child usually eats faster, is able to eat more independently, makes less of a mess, tries more foods, likes more foods, and loves to talk. The 3 and 4 year old child is more cooperative in general than the 1 and 2 year old.

However pleasant mealtimes, even at this age, don't just happen. Parents must still give the child positive, loving attention. The parent must still praise desirable behaviors while ignoring or downplaying less desirable behaviors. The parent must still be sensitive to the child's needs, set limits, and be consistent.

Setting limits means making rules for what behavior is acceptable. At this age, children become much more aware of rules and they can remember them. Mealtime rules should be simple, however, and repeated often. Sticking with the rules, day after day, makes a child learn them and obey them.

The parent's attitude toward mealtime is important. It will affect how well a young child eats. Ideally, parents can approach the family meal as a time when everyone is able to relax and enjoy the food and each other.

Even if the family is not able to share meals every day, encourage parents to make family mealtime special, pleasant, and something to look forward to.

Children eat better when they eat with others. Meals and snacks are important social times for all of us, including children. Parents should turn off the television and make mealtime a pleasant experience.

Children this age love to talk. Encourage each person to talk about their day at mealtime. Focusing on the events of the day, rather than talking about liking or disliking foods, can help create “Mealtime Magic.”

Children want attention at meals, especially if they have been away from their parents all day. Make sure children are getting positive attention. Otherwise, they may act up to get any kind of attention they can.



Although 3 and 4 year olds eat a little faster than they did as toddlers, they should not be rushed, because learning new skills and trying new foods takes time.

At this age, children are able to serve themselves and like to do it. It helps them feel independent and capable.

Parents should be encouraged to be patient and understanding if the child makes a mess or spills. Try not to let spills disturb the entire meal. Show your child how to help clean up and how to avoid future spills. Teach by showing, not just telling. For example, “Put the cup here, away from the edge of the table, so you don’t knock it over.”

Parents can encourage their child to eat new foods by offering small portions. Children sometimes eat new foods better when they are relaxed, not tired, and when the new food is served along with a favorite food. Children often must be exposed to a new food 15 to 20 times before actually eating it.<sup>2,3</sup>

Parents should *not* use foods to reward, bribe, or punish children, or to calm, comfort, or entertain them. Misusing food in this way trains children to view food as something different than an enjoyable way to satisfy hunger. Misusing food can result in eating problems later in life.

Children like to make choices. Being able to make choices gives a sense of some control and helps make a child cooperative. Being a decision-maker builds a child’s self-esteem. Parents can encourage their child to make choices between two alternatives that are acceptable to the parent. For example, the parent can ask, “Do you want salad dressing on your cucumbers?” or “Do you want to eat this with a spoon or a fork?”

Parents are encouraged to notice what their child is doing well at mealtime and mention it. Praise for positive eating behaviors makes children feel good about their skills. It helps them feel grown up and competent. Learning new skills and feeling competent about them is one of their primary developmental “jobs” at ages 3 and 4. Being good at doing things builds their self-esteem.

### Mealtime Magic happens when...

#### ■ Parents are good role models

Parents looking for “Mealtime Magic” must remember that children learn constantly from *watching* how their parents eat and act at mealtime. Teaching children how to eat and behave at the table means showing and modeling how to eat and behave. One of the most positive things parents can do is to sit down and eat with their children.

Children learn how parents expect them to eat by what parents do, what they say, and by what their rules are. Children learn new skills. They learn how to act at the table, talking and enjoying themselves with their families. They learn they belong in the family group and that they can eat like the grown ups do.

Parents can be positive role models by eating new foods themselves. Although most young children do not eat a wide variety of foods, parents who enjoy a wide variety of foods will usually have children who are more adventurous eaters in the long run.

Parents are also role models in their attitudes toward weight. To help a child develop a good body image, parents should not criticize their own size or shape, or anyone else’s. It is especially important not to criticize the child’s shape and size.

## Mealtime Magic happens when...

### ■ Parents teach children about food

Children are learning every day. The child's first and best teacher is the parent.

Parents are encouraged to teach children the names of foods. They can talk about a food's shape, color and taste, where the food comes from, and how it is grown.

Children become aware of new foods by seeing family and friends enjoying them.

Parents can involve the child in food shopping and cooking. Children ages 3 and 4 can help with simple tasks, like measuring, mixing, sprinkling cheese on a dish, tearing lettuce for salad, and setting the table. At mealtime, ask the child to talk about how he or she helped to prepare the meal.

Children can read stories, draw pictures, and sing songs related to foods. This will help them become familiar with new foods.

## A Review

Feeding a 3 or 4 year old is not nearly as challenging as feeding a toddler, but it's still not easy, because children this age:

- are often picky
- go on food jags occasionally
- have very strong likes and dislikes
- like to talk more than they want to eat
- continue to challenge their parents

However, children this age are now more grown up about eating. They can feed themselves, they will usually try more foods, and they have a greater interest in food in general.

Like toddlers, 3 and 4 year olds learn constantly. They model much of their behavior and beliefs around what they observe their family members do, eat, and say. Many lifelong attitudes and food habits are being established during this period.

It's important for parents to continue to observe a division of responsibility around eating.<sup>1</sup> Parents are responsible for *what, when, and where* the child eats. Children are responsible for deciding *whether to eat and how much* to eat. This means parents should provide regular meals and snacks, offering a variety of healthy foods. It is the child's responsibility to actually eat them and to decide how much to eat. Children do not eat well if they are forced to eat foods they don't like.

Pleasant mealtimes mean a lot to children this age. Mealtimes give them a chance to show off their new skills at eating, talking, and socializing.

Parents should be careful *not* to use foods to reward, bribe, or punish children, or to calm, comfort, or entertain their children. Misusing food in these ways can distort the child's relationship to food.

To help a child develop a good body image a parent should not criticize their own size or shape or anyone else's, especially the child's.

The overall goal of feeding children is for them to be well nourished and have a positive relationship to food and eating. This can help create a lifelong foundation for health.

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1. Satter EM. 1998. *Secrets of Raising a Healthy Eater*. Chelsea, MI: Kelcy Press.
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3. Satter EM. 1990. The feeding relationship: Problems and interventions. *Journal of Pediatrics* 117 (2, Pt. 2): S181-S189.

# Self-Check

## Mealtime Magic with Children

This is a simple self-check that lets you review the material you have just read. Answering these questions will prepare you for the post-test. The answers are on the next page.



### True or False:

Children's behaviors at mealtimes often reflect their stage of development.	True	False
At ages 3 and 4, a child's main developmental "job" is to learn new skills, practice them, and become competent.	True	False
Children this age dislike making choices. They would rather have the parent make most choices.	True	False
Children at ages 3 and 4 typically become more curious about food than they were as toddlers.	True	False
"Hands on" experiences with food can help children accept new foods.	True	False
Growth is the best indicator of whether or not a child is getting enough to eat.	True	False
Children often must be exposed to a new food many times before actually eating it.	True	False
At this age, children can help with simple tasks in the kitchen.	True	False
Family mealtimes give children a chance to show off their skills and learn new ones.	True	False
Using food to comfort a child can distort the child's relationship to food.	True	False
The overall goal of feeding children is for them to be well nourished and to have a positive relationship to food and to eating.	True	False

# Self-Check Answers

## Mealtime Magic with Children

### True or False:

- |  |       |
|--|-------|
| Children's behaviors at mealtimes often reflect their stage of development.  | True  |
| At ages 3 and 4, a child's main developmental "job" is to learn new skills, practice them, and become competent.                 | True  |
| Children this age dislike making choices. They would rather have the parent make most choices.                                   | False |
| Children at ages 3 and 4 typically become more curious about food than they were as toddlers.                                    | True  |
| "Hands on" experiences with food can help children accept new foods.   | True  |
| Growth is the best indicator of whether or not a child is getting enough to eat.   | True  |
| Children often must be exposed to a new food many times before actually eating it.   | True  |
| At this age, children can help with simple tasks in the kitchen.   | True  |
| Family mealtimes give children a chance to show off their skills and learn new ones.   | True  |
| Using food to comfort a child can distort the child's relationship to food.  | True  |
| The overall goal of feeding children is for them to be well nourished and to have a positive relationship to food and to eating. | True  |

## 4. Frequently Asked Questions

The following questions and answers are excerpted and adapted from *Bright Futures in Practice: Nutrition, Second Edition*. Some of these questions are a review of material you have already studied in previous chapters, and other material is new. Additional questions and answers can be found in the online version of *Bright Futures in Practice: Nutrition* at [www.brightfutures.org](http://www.brightfutures.org).

### Frequently Asked Questions about Mealtimes in Infancy

#### ■ How can I tell if my baby is ready to feed herself?

If your baby can pick up food and chew or mash it, she is ready to feed herself soft pieces of table food. She will let you know when she is ready to feed herself by picking up bits of soft food and putting them in her mouth. When your baby is ready to self-feed, let her do it. This is how she learns and develops.

#### ■ When should I introduce juice and how much?

Introduce juice at 4 to 6 months or later, using a cup.

Use a cup because juice in a bottle can bathe the teeth in sugar for long periods of time. Juice in a bottle can also make it harder to wean your baby from a bottle.

Although juices provide carbohydrates and vitamin C, do not use them instead of breastmilk or infant formula.

Offer juice in small amounts. A reasonable amount of juice is 4 to 6 ounces per day. Too much juice may decrease your baby's appetite for other foods and increase the risk of loose stools and diarrhea.

#### ■ How can I protect my baby's teeth from tooth decay?

Serve 100 percent fruit juice in a cup in small amounts, about 4 to 6 ounces per day.

Do not serve juice in a bottle. Juice served in a bottle can cover your baby's teeth with sugar for long periods of time and contribute to tooth decay.

Do not put your baby to bed with a bottle or allow her to have a bottle whenever she wants.

Clean your baby's gums and teeth twice a day. Use a clean, moist washcloth to wipe her gums. Use a small, soft toothbrush (without toothpaste) and water to clean her teeth.

If your baby is fed with a bottle, wean your baby to a cup at an appropriate age.

#### ■ When should I wean my baby from the bottle?

As your baby begins to eat more solid foods and drink from a cup, he can be weaned from the bottle.

Begin to wean your baby gradually, at about 9 to 10 months. By 12 to 14 months, most babies can drink from a cup.

## ■ How do I avoid feeding my baby too much?

The best way to avoid feeding your baby too much is to watch for baby's signals that say "I've had enough." Whether the baby is breast fed or bottle fed, babies will lose interest in feeding when they have had enough.

Mothers should breastfeed if possible. Among many other benefits, breastfeeding is a good way to avoid overfeeding a baby. Breastfeeding mothers must tune in to their baby's signals of fullness since that is the only way they can know if the baby is full.

Bottle feeding mothers should also decide when to stop a feeding by observing how satisfied the baby is, not by how many ounces have been fed. Bottle feeding, like breast feeding, requires the parent to know their baby's signals of hunger and fullness.

Feed your baby until she is full. Do not force her to finish a bottle or other foods.

Allow plenty of time for a feeding so that you don't feel rushed.

Enlarging the hole in the bottle nipple to make expressed breastmilk or infant formula come out faster may cause the infant to choke or gasp for air.

Do not add cereal to the bottle. This may cause your baby to eat more than she needs.

Using food to comfort your baby may teach her to use food as a source of comfort as she gets older. Comfort your baby by talking to her and by cuddling, rocking, and walking her—not by feeding her.

## Frequently Asked Questions about Mealtimes, age 1 to 5

### ■ How can I teach my child healthy eating behaviors?

Enjoy meals together as a family. Keep in mind that you are responsible for *what*, *when*, and *where* your child eats. Let your child decide *whether to eat* and *how much*.<sup>1</sup> Do not force your child to eat.

Offer a variety of healthy foods, and encourage your child to try different ones.

Let your child help with food shopping and preparation.

Do not use food to reward, bribe, comfort or punish your child.

Be a positive role model. Practice healthy eating behaviors yourself.

### ■ How can I make mealtimes enjoyable?

Approach meals as a pleasant family time that everyone looks forward to.

Create a relaxed setting for meals and limit distractions. For example, turn off the TV.

Include your child in the conversation. Don't use mealtimes to discipline or deal with unpleasant family issues.

Having clearly understood ground rules helps, such as the parent is responsible for *what*, *when*, and *where* the child eats. The child decides *whether to eat* and *how much*.<sup>1</sup>

Be patient and understanding when your child makes a mess while he learns to feed himself.

Serve healthy foods for meals and snacks at scheduled times, but allow for flexibility.

Let your child help himself to the food, if possible. If you serve the food, don't put too much on the plate.

Offer your child choices about how foods should be cut, what dressing should be used, what dinnerware should be used, and other choices that give your child a feeling of control.

Use your child's favorite plate, bowl, cup, and eating utensils.

### ■ **Why is a daily routine of meals and snacks important?**

Children like routines. Routines make them feel safe and secure. Children respond well to a routine of regularly scheduled meals and snacks.

Parents find routines make life with young children easier. Children who are not in a regular daily routine of meals and snacks may ask for food constantly.

### ■ **My 2-year-old's appetite has changed. Should I be worried?**

Toddler appetites are usually smaller than those of babies because they are now growing more slowly. This smaller appetite tends to worry parents, especially if toddlers are in child care all day and refuse to eat when they get home.

Toddlers may tend to eat more during the day than in the evening. Their appetites change a lot from day to day, even from meal to meal.

If your child is energetic and growing well, she is probably eating enough. If you are offering nutritious foods at regular and

pleasant meals and snacks, you are doing a good job. Try to relax.

### ■ **What should my child eat?**

At mealtime, offer small portions of what the rest of your family is eating (for example, bread, pasta, or rice; fruits and vegetables; cheese or yogurt; and cooked lean meat, poultry, fish, or eggs).

Healthy snacks are very important because young children do not eat much at mealtime. Suitable snacks are the same foods that might be offered at meals, such as fruits, cheese, bread, crackers and yogurt.

Snacks mid-way between meals are important for children, since they do not eat much at one time. Snacks too close to mealtime, however, will spoil your child's appetite for the meal--and your child is more likely to pick at the meal and refuse to eat.

Children under 2 usually eat small portions. Offer small portions of foods (for example, 1 or 2 tablespoons) and let your child ask for more if he is still hungry.

Offer your child food every 2 to 3 hours, at a regularly scheduled meal or snack. Snacks should be planned. Consider them as small meals, not as treats.

### ■ **What can I do about my picky eater?**

Most young children are "picky eaters." This is typical and predictable. Try not to worry. Instead, do your job of providing healthy foods at regular meals and snacks. Make mealtime pleasant. Teach your child about new foods and support your child as she tries new foods. Be a good role model for healthy eating.



Look at your child's eating over time rather than at each meal. If your child is energetic and growing well, she is probably eating enough. The best indicator of an adequate diet is the child's growth--not how much the child eats.

Don't force your child to eat. Offer her nutritious foods and let her decide what to eat and how much.

Continue to serve a new food even if your child has rejected it. It can take many exposures to a new food before a child will eat it.

Let your child participate in food shopping and preparation.

Do not use food to reward, bribe, comfort or punish your child.

### ■ **My child sometimes dawdles during meals. What can I do?**

Children have short attention spans. It is normal for children to lose interest in an activity, including eating, after a short time. They are also easily distracted. Try to reduce distractions (for example, television) during meals and snacks.

If your child has taken what seems to you to be far too long to eat, end the meal and do not give more food until the next regularly scheduled meal or snack. Do not force the child to eat.

### ■ **I am struggling with my child over food. Is this normal?**

Your child may struggle with you over food in an attempt to make his own decisions and become independent. This is normal.

Struggling over food may make your child even *more* determined. Battles with children over food are usually not worth

fighting. Mealtimes are too important to spend fighting about food.

Keep in mind that you are responsible for *what, when, and where* your child eats. Let your child decide *whether to eat and how much*.<sup>1</sup>

Continue to serve a new food even if your child has rejected it. It may take quite a number of times before your child accepts the food.

### ■ **My child wants to eat the same thing every day. What should I do?**

Food jags (when children want to eat only a particular food) are common.

Offer smaller servings of the favorite food, along with other foods to ensure that your child eats a variety of foods.

Food jags rarely last long enough to be harmful. If your child is energetic and growing well, she is probably eating enough.

### ■ **How can I get my child to try new foods?**

Offer small portions of new foods—perhaps 1 or 2 tablespoons—and let your child ask for more.

Encourage your child to try a new food, but don't force your child to eat it. Continue to serve a new food even if your child has rejected it. You may do this many times before he accepts the food.

Introduce a new food in a neutral manner. Talk about the food's color, shape, aroma, and texture, but don't talk about whether it tastes good.

Serve your child's favorite foods along with a new food. He may be more willing to try a new food if his favorite foods are on his plate.

Be a positive role model. Eat a wide variety of foods and try new foods yourself.

Make new foods appealing by involving your child in shopping and preparing the new food.

Be creative. For example, cut foods into various shapes using cookie cutters and create fun names for foods (for example, "little trees" for broccoli).

### ■ What should my child drink?

Your child should drink about 2 cups (16 ounces) of milk per day. Drinking more than this can reduce your child's appetite for other healthy foods.

Until age 2, do not give your child reduced-fat (2 percent), low-fat (1 percent), or fat-free (skim) milk. Children need the extra fat in whole milk for growth and development. After age 2, you can serve low-fat or skim milk.

Offer juice in small amounts, about 4 to 6 ounces per day. Drinking more than this can reduce your child's appetite for other healthy foods.

Serve juice in a cup, not a bottle. Juice served in a bottle can cover your child's teeth with sugar for long periods of time and contribute to tooth decay (early childhood caries).

Your child may not tell you when she is thirsty. Make sure she drinks plenty of water throughout the day, especially between meals and snacks.

### ■ How can I help my child get enough calcium?

Serve foods that are rich in calcium, such as milk; cheese; yogurt; tofu processed with calcium sulfate; broccoli; and collard and turnip greens.

If your child does not like milk, serve flavored milk, such as chocolate or strawberry.

Use dairy products in recipes, such as in puddings, milkshakes, soups, and casseroles.

Try other dairy products, such as new flavors of yogurt.

If your child's digestive system cannot handle milk and other dairy products (this is known as "lactose intolerance"), try these suggestions:

- Serve small portions of dairy products throughout the day. Small amounts are usually well tolerated.
- Serve these foods along with non-dairy foods.
- Serve lactose-free dairy products and yogurt. Aged hard cheeses, such as Cheddar, Colby, Swiss, and Parmesan, are low in lactose.
- Give your child lactase tablets before he eats dairy products containing lactose.
- Add lactose drops to your child's milk.
- Serve foods, such as orange juice and cereal products, which have added calcium (calcium-fortified).

If these ideas do not work, ask a health professional about giving your child a calcium supplement.

### ■ **Should I give my child a vitamin and mineral supplement?**

If your child is growing and eats a variety of healthy foods, she does not need a vitamin and mineral supplement.

Talk to a health professional if you are considering giving your child a vitamin and mineral supplement.

Keep all vitamin and mineral supplements out of your child's reach. Supplements may look like candy, and consuming too many at once can be harmful.

### ■ **What should I do if my child seems overweight?**

If your child seems overweight, the best things to do are these:

Be a positive role model. Practice healthy eating behaviors and participate in regular physical activity.

Focus on gradually changing the entire family's eating behaviors and physical activity practices instead of singling out the overweight child.

Encourage an hour of active play or more each day. Provide opportunities for physical activity for the whole family. Plan family activities that everyone enjoys (for example, nature walks, riding bicycles, or swimming).

Limit the amount of time your child spends watching television and videos, and playing computer games. One to two hours a day is enough.

Serve scheduled meals and snacks, rather than letting your child eat off and on throughout the day. Encourage drinking water for thirst. Do not forbid sweets and desserts. Serve them in moderation.

Provide a wide variety of nutritious foods at meals and snacks. Eat a wide variety of nutritious foods yourself. Eat at least 5 servings a day of fruits and vegetables.

Let your child know that people come in unique sizes and shapes and that he is loved just as he is. Never criticize your child's size or shape. If someone comments about your child's size or shape, change the subject to your child's other qualities.

Never place your child on a diet to lose weight, unless a health professional recommends one for medical reasons and supervises it.

### ■ **How can I help my child like her body?**

Be a positive role model. Let your child see that you value your own body and that you do things to keep yourself healthy. Be positive about having a healthy body. Encourage your child to take care of her body, too.

Don't criticize your own size or shape or that of others. Most importantly, don't criticize your child's size or shape.

Focus on traits other than appearance when talking to your child. Appearance is just one aspect of who your child is.

### ■ **Should my child eat low-fat foods?**

Reduced-fat (2 %), low-fat (1 %), and fat-free (skim) milk are not recommended during the first 2 years, because babies and young children need fat for growth and development.

After 2 years of age, children should gradually eat more low-fat foods. As they begin to consume fewer calories from fat,

children need more breads and cereals, fruits and vegetables, lower-fat or fat-free milk, lean meats, and other high-protein foods.

It is important for children to consume enough calories to grow well. When children are very active or having a growth spurt, they may need more calories.

### ■ **How can I prevent my child from choking?**

Eat together. An adult should always be with the child when the child is eating.

Have your child sit while eating. Eating while walking or running may cause choking.

Keep things calm at meal and snack times. Children who become overexcited may choke.

Do not let your child eat in a moving car. If she chokes while you are driving, you will not be able to help her.

For children younger than 3, avoid all foods that may cause choking, such as hard candy, mini-marshmallows, popcorn, pretzels, chips, spoonfuls of peanut butter, nuts, seeds, large chunks of meat, hot dogs, raw carrots, raisins and other dried fruits, and whole grapes.

Children ages 3 to 5 may eat the foods listed above if the foods are modified to make them safer to eat. For instance, hot dogs should be cut in quarters lengthwise and then into small pieces. Grapes should be cut in half lengthwise. Nuts should be cut finely. Carrots should be cut finely or into thin strips. Peanut butter should be spread thinly on crackers or bread.

Talk about new foods with your child. Read books that include fruits and vegetables in the story. Talk about where foods come from. Color pictures of fruits and

vegetables. Let your child choose a new fruit or vegetable in the grocery store.

### ■ **How can I get my child to eat more fruits and vegetables?**

Keep a variety of fruits and vegetables at home. Keep 100% fruit juice in the refrigerator.

Prepare fruits and vegetables ahead of time. Wash and cut up fruits and vegetables and keep them in the refrigerator, along with low-fat dip or salsa. Use a clear container so that the fruits and vegetables can be seen easily.

Serve two or more vegetables with dinner, including at least one your child likes. Serve a salad with a choice of low-fat dressing if your child is able to eat salads.

Be a good role model. Eat a wide variety of food and try new foods yourself. Eat at least 5 servings a day of fruits and vegetables.

### ■ **How can our family eat healthy meals together when we are so busy?**

Make food preparation and cooking a family activity. Set aside time, perhaps on weekends, to cook together.

Eat different meals together. For example, eat breakfast together one day, and lunch or dinner the next.

No time to cook? Buy healthy ready-to-eat foods from the store or healthy take-out foods from a restaurant.

Make family mealtimes pleasant and they will happen more often!

#### **Reference:**

1. Satter EM. 1998. *Secrets of Raising a Healthy Eater*. Chelsea, MI: Kelcy Press.

# Self-Check

## Frequently Asked Questions

This is a simple self-check that lets you review the material you have just read. Answering these questions will prepare you for the post-test. The answers are on the next page.



### True or False:

It is appropriate to introduce juice at 4 to 6 months of age or later, using a cup.	True	False
A reasonable amount of juice a day for an infant is 4 to 6 ounces.	True	False
A young child should be offered food every 2 to 3 hours, at regularly scheduled meals and snacks.	True	False
If a child is energetic and growing well, the child is probably eating enough.	True	False
Children are easily distracted. Reducing distractions, like television, can help them eat better.	True	False
Children have short attention spans. It is normal for them to lose interest in eating after a short time.	True	False
It is normal for children to struggle with parents over food, in an attempt to make their own decisions and become independent.	True	False
Food jags are very common and rarely last long enough to be harmful.	True	False
It's a good idea to introduce a new food in a neutral manner.	True	False
Children should be encouraged to get one hour or more of active play a day.	True	False

# Self-Check Answers

## Frequently Asked Questions

### True or False:

It is appropriate to introduce juice at 4 to 6 months of age or later, using a cup.	True
A reasonable amount of juice a day for an infant is 4 to 6 ounces.	True
A young child should be offered food every 2 to 3 hours, at regularly scheduled meals and snacks.	True
If a child is energetic and growing well, the child is probably eating enough.	True
Children are easily distracted. Reducing distractions, like television, can help them eat better.	True
Children have short attention spans. It is normal for them to lose interest in eating after a short time.	True
It is normal for children to struggle with parents over food, in an attempt to make their own decisions and become independent.	True
Food jags are very common and rarely last long enough to be harmful.	True
It's a good idea to introduce a new food in a neutral manner.	True
Children should be encouraged to get one hour or more of active play a day.	True