

# Tips for common mealtime challenges



Growing healthy eaters takes time and there are no quick fixes. Learning to eat is a journey.

Remove some of the mealtime stresses by removing distractions like TV, reducing snacking before meals, being a good role model and always offering a familiar food with a new food.

## My child won't eat vegetables



**Less than 10% of young children eat the recommended serves for their age.** We are born with a preference for sweet food so the bitter taste of vegetables is one that children have to get used to.



**Try serving veg differently. Serve baked or add bread crumbs, herbs, spices, a dip like tzatziki or a small amount of sauce.** Sauces can be high in sugar and salt so use small amounts, but they can be your friend when trying to get your child to eat vegetables.

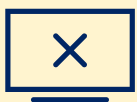


**Be a role model and let them see you enjoying vegetables.** Eventually they will try it too – in the mean time they won't starve.



**Include your child in preparing meals.** They are more likely to eat vegetables when they feel it, hold it, smell it, taste it.

## My child takes a long time to eat



**Turn off all distractions** TVs and other screens and devices.



**Avoid snacking before meals** – your child needs to feel hungry if you want them to eat.



**Offer a very small amount** and then offer more once they eat it – that way it's less overwhelming.



**Set a time limit** and if the food isn't eaten, save it for later.

## My child always asks for dinner at bed time or once they've been put to bed



**Make a rule that food won't be provided at bed time and talk to your child about it.** Offer a healthy snack an hour before bed if they haven't eaten dinner. Give them plenty of notice that they won't be given food once they've gone to bed.



**Some children do this to delay bed time** - it is a phase and will pass.

## My child isn't willing to try new foods



**Offer a new food with familiar foods.**



**Avoid snacking before meals.** Make sure they are really hungry.



**Role model.** Let your child see you trying it and eat together as a family when possible.



**Turn off distractions.** TV, iPad/tablet or other devices.



If it's a mixed food like a casserole, **offer a small amount** alongside a familiar food like toast fingers.



**Try not to pressure your child to eat.** This will only make mealtimes more difficult. Your child might force it down but they will think negatively of that food long term.

## My child only eats a small variety of foods



Always offer a new food with a familiar food.



Offer foods in different ways: steamed, mashed, chopped, raw, sliced, season with spices or serve with a sauce.



Get your child to help prepare the food in some way.



Ask your child to come shopping with you and have them choose one new food to try.



Role model - let them see you trying and enjoying new foods.

## My child says they aren't hungry at meal times but then asks for something later on

- **Discuss with your child this is what is on offer for dinner.** It's ok if they aren't hungry now, but when they are hungry it will be there for them. This should work as long as there is something on the plate that you know they are familiar with and will usually eat.
- **Encourage your child to stay at the table or seated with the rest of the family until everyone else is finished.** They don't have to eat, but they can be involved in conversation. Keep this realistic, we don't expect a two-year old to stay at the table for 20 minutes if not eating.
- **Avoid snacking before meals.** Your child should feel hungry before mealtimes.
- **Turn off distractions.** This includes the TV, iPad/tablet or other devices.



Growing a healthy eater takes time. Trust your child knows what their body needs and don't give up when they refuse a food. It is all part of the process.

Healthy Eating  
Active Living

