

Wellness Tips for Alaska's Young Children

Stress-Free Meals

Happy, positive mealtimes create healthy eating habits for the whole family. **Stress-free mealtimes teach young children to:**

- Try the foods their parents eat
- Eat the amount their bodies need
- Practice their table manners

What's my role?

Trust your children's ability to feed themselves. Allow them to decide how much to eat and if they want to eat or not.

At mealtime, **you should provide** the...

- **WHAT:** Prepare healthy foods for the entire family.
- **WHEN:** Provide meals and snacks at the same time every day. Routines help children learn when food will be available.
- **WHERE:** Serve meals and snacks at a table, a kitchen counter or even on the floor—just as long as your children sit down to eat.



It starts with me!

Enjoy eating healthy foods with your children. They'll be more likely to try them.

Tips for Parents

- **Fix one meal for the whole family.** Allow your children to choose from what is offered.
- **Serve only water** between meals and snacks.
- **Offer fruit** instead of sugary foods and drinks.
- **Treat snacks like mini-meals.** Serve last night's leftover meat and veggies or top canned peaches with cottage cheese.
- **Make family time.** Even if your children are not hungry, have them sit with the family to enjoy time spent together.



Praise your children

when they taste a new food or practice good table manners, not when they clean their plate.

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Stress-Free Meal Times

Tips for Enjoying Mealtime

- **Eat together as a family.**
Talk about the day. Tell silly jokes.
- **Teach your children about table manners.**
Excuse them if they misbehave. Invite them to eat again at the next scheduled meal.
- **Let your children stop eating when they are done.**
Forcing children to clean their plates teaches them to overeat.
- **Free meals and snacks from distractions.**
No Television, no computer and no phone are allowed.
- **Be patient.**
It may take 15–20 attempts before your child learns to like a new food.
- **Involve your kids.**
Let your children help with setting the table or washing the fruits and vegetables.



Pair new foods with favorite foods.
Serve a new vegetable with your children's favorite dip. Encourage them to try it—but don't pressure them to eat it!



For more information on meal times, visit:

- **Choose My Plate – Picky Eating:**
<https://www.choosemyplate.gov/preschoolers-picky-eating>
- **Ellyn Satter Institute:**
<http://www.ellynsatterinstitute.org>
- **Healthy Children – Tips for Preventing Food Hassles:**
<https://www.healthychildren.org>

Relax about picky eating.

Don't worry if your children clean their plate one day and barely touch it the next. It's normal!

Information adapted from *Your Child's Weight: Helping Without Harming* by Ellyn Satter (2005) and *Feeding Guidelines for Infants and Young Toddlers: A Responsive Parenting Approach* by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Healthy Eating Research (2017).



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