

How to Feed Children

Children are born knowing when they are hungry and when they are full. Each child will grow in a way that is right for them if they are supported to listen to their body.

Parent or caregiver role

To decide what food is offered, when and where.

Child's role

To choose whether to eat the food and how much.

It is normal for:

- your child to eat a different amount of food each day
- your child to eat differently to other children.

Tips for feeding children

Offer your child food about five times a day for example, breakfast, lunch and dinner and a snack mid morning and afternoon. Have water on offer between meals. Base how much food you offer on your child's appetite.

Set children up for success

Always offer a food you know your child will eat like bread, pasta, rice, cut up vegetables or fresh fruit, together with other foods. This will help your child be comfortable at mealtimes. It also provides the opportunity to learn to like new foods in their own time.

You can help children by

- Setting up a daily mealtime routine. Allowing about 2 hours between each meal and snack time helps regulate appetite.
- Letting your child decide when they are finished. Forcing or rewarding a child to eat can make them forget how it feels to be hungry or full.
- Sitting down to eat with your child. They will learn by watching you.
- Showing you eat and enjoy a variety of foods.
- Trying not to talk about what or how much your child eats, or use names like "fussy eater".
- Trying not to use food to reward, comfort or to manage behaviour.
- All of this helps make both children and adults feel more relaxed. This allows mealtimes and eating to be more enjoyable for all.

Want to know more

Ask your GP or child health nurse.