

Supporting Positive Mealtimes

Promote Happy, Healthy Eating for Children by Supporting Positive, Relaxed and Social Mealtimes

Mealtimes provide an ideal time for children to develop healthy eating habits, social skills and language. Allowing children time to taste and enjoy their food, to make choices and to interact with others helps to create pleasant mealtimes, relaxed experiences and an opportunity for adults to role model healthy eating habits.

Why Support Positive Meals and Snacks?

Positive meal and snack times promote:

Social Connection: Meal and snack times are a chance to connect and build relationships. Engaging children in pleasant conversation helps create relaxed mealtimes and stronger relationships.

Learning: Meal and snack time are a chance to role model and help children learn. Children can practice language and social skills and learn about food and eating.

Health: Meal and snack times are a chance to help children build healthy habits. The eating habits you teach children in the early years can form a pattern that lasts a lifetime.

Tips to support positive mealtimes

Here are some tips to support positive mealtimes:

- 1. Eat at the same time, everyday:** Schedule snacks, meals and water breaks to take place at the same time each day. Try to stick to this schedule even on outings. Ensure water is available at all times.
- 2. Develop mealtime routines and ensure consistency:** Follow the same process of preparing for snacks and meals. This might involve hand washing, setting a table, sitting and eating for a set period of time, and then clearing the table.
- 3. Eat with children:** Eating with children allows for adults to model healthy eating habits. Children learn their eating habits from adults.



4. Focus on food when eating:

Avoid watching TV during meal or snack times. Instead, sit with children and discuss their meals. Mealtime can be a pleasant time for interaction and conversation.

5. Schedule lunch for after playtime: Some children will eat faster than others. Avoid planning a popular activity for right after lunch or snack as it may encourage some children to rush through eating.

6. Practice a neutral approach: Offer opportunities for children to taste without pressure and without expecting them to have "just one bite." Let children decide if he/she will taste a food or not. Avoid using food as a reward or labelling them as "good," "bad" or "junk." If we label foods, we may set the stage for unintended negative consequences.

Model Positive Eating Behaviour

Caregivers are an important role model for good table manners, trying new foods, and enjoying mealtimes. Children and youth are more likely to eat foods their parents and family also enjoy eating.

Routinely offer new foods as part of your regular mealtime. Children often need to see, smell, and touch a food many times before trying it. Offer new foods with familiar foods and include foods your child has refused in the past.



Not everyone likes every food, and that's okay. Encourage kids to say "no, thank you," if they don't want to eat something.

Trust children to show or tell you how much they want to eat and when they are finished eating. An important part of healthy eating is learning to stop when they are full.

Try not to rush children through a meal. Children often take longer to eat than adults. Remind children to eat slowly, chew their food well and enjoy what they are eating.

Contact

If you have questions, contact your local Registered Dietitian at Community Health Services:

Medicine Hat	403-502-8200
Brooks	403-501-3300
Lethbridge	403-388-6666

Toads in a Hole

- 1 egg
- 1 slice whole grain bread
- 1 tsp (5 ml) margarine
- 2 tsp (10 ml) shredded parmesan cheese



Instructions: Heat griddle. Spread margarine on both sides of the bread. Cut a small hole in the centre of the bread. Add to heated griddle and crack an egg to add to the centre of the hole. Cook on both sides until brown. Sprinkle with parmesan cheese and enjoy!

Tip: Read [Toads on Toast](#) with your child.

Upcoming Nutrition Classes

Due to the ongoing COVID-19 situation, all in-person nutrition classes are now being offered online via Zoom. To look for upcoming nutrition classes, please go to: szonenutrition.eventbrite.com/

Alberta Healthy Living Program: Classes are offered virtually throughout South Zone to help manage chronic conditions. Topics include Diabetes, Weight Management, Stress Management, Healthy Eating to Reduce your Risk, Emotional Eating and more.

To register call: **Lethbridge 1-866-506-6654, Medicine Hat 1-866-795-9709, Brooks 1-866-795-9709**

For more information on this or other nutrition topics and Covid-19, go to

www.healthyeatingstartshere.ca,
<https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/covid19>

