

TIP SHEET: Mealtime Problems

Ages Affected: 2–4 years old

Teaching your child to eat properly with manners and to eat at a regular time each day is something that should be taught at a young age. Eating at regular times will help your child develop in the healthiest manner possible.

Understanding your child:

Mealtime can be rough if you have not gone over how to eat properly at the dinner table. It is important to have realistic expectations about a family meal. When a preschool age child first begins to eat at a table, there are likely to be spills and messes. This isn't misbehavior; your child is just learning and exploring his world. Try to stay calm and look for opportunities to praise your child.

Here are some tips for teaching your child to eat at the table:

- Be realistic. Because young children are also easily distracted and find it hard to sit in one place for a long time, 20 to 30 minutes is a good time limit for a main meal.
 - Establish a routine. Try to serve three main meals—morning, afternoon and night. Explain to your child she will only be allowed food at these times.
 - Encourage your child to eat a variety of foods. He will develop preferences for some foods over others, just as adults do.
 - Keep in mind that it often takes 10-15 tries before a child will start to like new foods.
 - Set rules. Decide on two or three easy rules for mealtime and after awhile your child will be able
- to remember your rules. Some possible rules are: sit at the table until you are excused; eat with your fork or spoon; finish your food before you speak so you don't talk with your mouth full of food.
 - Make sure you have everything ready on the table before you call your child to eat. Children can easily get restless and misbehave when they are waiting and hungry.
 - Have your child concentrate on his meal. Remove all toys and other distractions from the table.
 - If your child misbehaves at the table, immediately tell your child to stop and tell and/or show her how she should be behaving.

