Did You Know . . .

Children spend up to a third of their time in child care involved in eating?

Eating habits, taste preferences and attitudes towards food are formed during early childhood. Early mealtime experiences influence children’s food acceptance and ability to self-regulate their own food intake based on internal cues for hunger and fullness. The childhood mealtime environment shapes eating habits that continue into adolescence and adulthood.

When children pass and request foods during mealtimes they learn social skills and build on fine motor skills. For young children, mealtimes offer opportunities to develop confidence, practice language and even acquire math concepts.

What you say matters to children during mealtimes

Practice “Process Centered Comments”

“You picked up that carrot. You smelled it. You tasted it. You took a bite and you chewed it all up. Then you said you liked it. You are learning to try foods you’ve never tried before!”

Feeding Young Children in Group Settings: www.cals.uidaho.edu/feeding/

Child Care Health Outreach Program

Mission Statement

To promote and maintain healthy, safe and nurturing child care environments through support, education, and collaboration involving the child care community.

Training for Child Care Providers

The Child Care Health Outreach Program offers consultations and free STARS-approved Distance Learning Courses for child care providers in Snohomish County. We encourage child care providers to take advantage of our services to improve the health and safety of children in their care.

For More Information

• Go to www.snohd.org/children-family/child-care-providers or
• Email at childcarehealth@snohd.org

Snohomish Health District
Child Care Health Outreach Program
3020 Rucker Avenue, Ste 104
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Creating Healthy Mealtimes

Improve the health of children. Make meals matter.
How to Make Meals Matter More

Children’s health depends on adults providing a variety of foods throughout the day. Practicing safe food handling, fostering self-regulation and role modeling during mealtimes are also important mealtime considerations.

During meals and snacks adults can . . .

1. **Help children self-regulate**
   - Use language that helps identify children’s hunger and fullness cues
   - Allow children to determine which foods and how much food they eat
   - Avoid cajoling or bribing children to eat a specific food

2. **Establish a mealtime routine**
   Children appreciate structure. To minimize stress at mealtimes, establish a few structured activities that children depend on doing.
   - Wash hands prior to all meals and snacks
   - Let children take turns helping set the table
   - Do some stationary stretches to help get the wiggles out before sitting down
   - Ensure enough space is provided for comfortable seating
   - Everyone sits down to eat at a designated space
   - Avoid waiting more than 5 minutes for the food to arrive
   - Sing songs while waiting
   - Hold hands and give thanks for the food

3. **Eat with children**
   When adults eat with children, mealtimes are safe, calm and enjoyable.
   - Help children practice safe mealtime behaviors
   - Model eating the same foods children are served
   - Establish table manners

4. **Serve family style**
   When left to their own internal cues, children effectively respond to feelings of hunger and satisfaction and maintain the ability to self-regulate. Adults can help direct children to eat when hungry and stop when satisfied by being aware of their cues. Serving family style gives children the chance to make their own food selection from the foods available. They eat better and mealtimes are a happy occasion.
   - Take baby steps to begin the process of family style meal service
   - Practice at the sensory table or at other times during the day
   - Explain what is going to happen and make it sound exciting.
   - Show each child how to serve a food. Give them hand and verbal assists.
   - Start by passing one food at a time and add others as children show they are ready.
   - Pass around new foods with familiar and well-liked foods.
   - Be patient. Allow extra time for meals during the learning process.
   - Use child sized serving bowls, plates and serving utensils.
   - Have clean up supplies close at hand. Let the kids help wipe up spills.
   - It may seem messy at first, but a child’s development is worth the effort.