

Idaho Fit Kids=Happy Kids



Teaching Your Child to *Enjoy* Mealtime!



Food is one of the joys of life. When families enjoy meals together, this is what children can learn:

- ⊂ Family meals make children feel secure and loved. They learn how to care and share. Children who help prepare meals and set the table also learn important life skills. Children love to help.
- ⊂ Family meals promote good eating habits and teach children to like healthy foods. Family meals also teach children eye-hand coordination and table manners.

Family meals should be *fun*. But the more you fuss over what your child does not eat, the more he may refuse in order to get attention. Here are some ways your family can *enjoy* mealtimes.

- ⊂ Offer *healthy* choices for both meals and snacks. Be firm. If your child wants something else, say, “These are the choices. Which do you want?” If your child does not eat, don’t worry. She will not starve herself, but she will eat poorly at meals if she gets soda and chips in between.
- ⊂ Schedule meals and snacks at times your child usually gets hungry. If he refuses, wait until the next planned time. Stick to the schedule. If your child whines, remind him that he chose not to eat and that he will have another chance later on. Hungry children learn to satisfy their hunger by eating what you offer.
- ⊂ Avoid watching TV while eating. TV distracts children and makes them tend to overeat.
- ⊂ Serve *small* portions. Big portions overwhelm small children. If you are concerned about how little your child eats, ask WIC to check her growth. If your child is growing, she is eating enough for her size.
- ⊂ Young children cannot sit still for very long. When your child is finished eating, have a quiet activity planned, like coloring, until the rest of the family finishes eating.
- ⊂ Children like to feed themselves and enjoy exploring food with their fingers. Cut the food in small pieces before you put it on the plate. Offer utensils but don’t make your child use them. Expect a mess!
- ⊂ Respect your child’s food likes and dislikes even if they are different from your own. Forcing your child to eat makes mealtime unpleasant for everyone and makes your child less willing to try new foods.
- ⊂ Your child may refuse a new food the first few times you offer it. Be patient. She may have to see, touch and taste a new food ten or more times. Keep offering it, and praise your child when she tries a new food.
- ⊂ Avoid using food as a bribe or a reward. That way, your child will learn to enjoy food rather than use it for attention or