

IDEAS FOR KEEPING CHILDREN FOCUSED AT MEALTIMES

Shared mealtimes are extremely helpful to expose your child to a wide variety of family foods. Mealtimes also help your child learn about different types and presentations of foods and allows them to learn what to do at mealtimes.

If your child struggles with attention and focus, it can sometimes be difficult for your child to participate in shared mealtimes. Here are a few tips to support your child to focus during mealtimes.

1 Develop a mealtime routine

Create a routine before the meal so that your child is coming to the meal in a 'calm-alert' state where they are ready to participate.

This might include:

- Giving a 5-minute warning that a mealtime is coming soon
- Washing hands
- Setting the table.

Engaging in these steps before every mealtime sets up a routine and helps your child shift their focus from the activity that they are doing to the mealtime.



2 Try a wiggle break

If you notice that your child regularly wants to get up from the table during a mealtime, offer a 1-minute wiggle break so they can move their body. Set a timer for the break so they know when it is time to come back to the table for the rest of the mealtime.



3 Set up the environment

Keep mealtimes calm and free from clutter, distractions and devices. Set up expectations that mealtimes are device-free zones. You may want to put all devices in a box when coming to the table and turn the television and tablet devices off.

4 Prepare your child for mealtimes

Explain to your child what the mealtime will look like *before* the mealtime, so they know what to expect and feel calmer. For example, let them know what you would like to see from them during a mealtime, what food will be served and how long the mealtime will go for.

5 Offer praise for the small things you see

Praise your child if they display a certain behaviour that you want to see at the mealtime.

For example, you might say 'I love the way you are sitting up tall in your chair', or 'it is great that you are using your spoon'. Reinforcing the mealtime behaviours that you want to see will help your child to feel good about themselves, feel calm and learn what is expected at mealtimes in a positive way.

For additional support for your child, speak to an Accredited Practising Dietitian.



GROW STRONG