

A healthy diet is a great starting point to ensuring a child's health now and for the future. Eating well supports a child's ability to grow and develop physically as well as promoting a healthy brain which is ready to learn from the world around. A healthy diet includes a range of fruit and vegetables, carbohydrates such as bread, pasta and rice, unsaturated fats such as olive or sunflower oil, protein from a range of sources such as poultry, eggs, nuts or tofu, dairy products such as milk and yogurt and plenty of water.

For children with SEND mealtimes and eating can present another challenge to face during the day due to a number of reasons; this may include a previous feeding tube, reflux, difficulties coordinating mouth muscles or sensory processing difficulties.

Whilst the journey to a healthy diet can feel very daunting when you are facing some of these challenges, it is important to focus on small steps of progress and seek specialist support if you are ever concerned about your child's health.



Every child's journey will be different and that's okay. Remember to speak to a medical professional if you are concerned about your child's health.

Top Tips for Healthy Eating



Present it differently. Many foods can be prepared in different ways: roasted, mashed, boiled, steamed, grated, chopped. If your child didn't like mashed potato, it doesn't mean they don't like all potato, you could try boiled or roasted instead.

Comfort objects do have a place at the table. If your child has a comfort teddy or a favourite object from a calm box its okay to bring this to the table. How often have you watched television or looked at your phone whilst eating? Whilst these activities do not stimulate or support a child's development and ability to connect, the principle is the same. Having familiar objects around may put them at ease, and Mr Dinosaur may even want to try some of their food!



It is not a race. It is okay that some things won't happen - yet. Many children need a huge amount of exposure to a new food before they are comfortable to eat it without question and this takes time. You could use a food diary to track exposure to each new food and celebrate eventual success.

Have water available throughout the day. This could be a small jug and cup that your child can pour for themselves or an appropriate beaker that can be moved around with them (an open cup, soft mouth pieces or straws are better for your child's oral development, unless directed by a medical professional otherwise).



Be a role model. Sitting together for meals and snacks will engage your child in the social aspect of a meal and is a chance for them to see you try different foods and even hear you talk about trying something new (even if it's not really new to you!)



A plate with sections, or a small bowl on the side, can expose your child to a new food item without it touching or having an impact on other foods you know they will eat. They don't have to eat the new food but by accepting it on their plate they are making the first step.



Repetition is okay. When you discover a food your child is happy to eat, it is fine to eat this every day. If they have a favourite colour bowl and cutlery, get more than one! Use this for every meal.



It may benefit your child to explore food with their hands and feed themselves this way, or even just being brave and licking the new food off their hand after giving it a poke. Equally your child may not wish to touch food with their hands and so eating a sandwich or slice of pizza with cutlery is also okay.



Read books and stories which promote healthy eating. You could read at the table during a snack time or you could read for the joy of it at any time of day, but hearing about and seeing others engage in healthy eating promotes a positive attitude towards it.



They can always ask for more. Keep portions small so as not to overwhelm your child with how much to eat. Always remember to offer more and wait for their response rather than just adding more to their plate, this will support some recognition of how full they are.

