



## Healthy Mealtime Habits

Healthy mealtime habits lay the foundation for lifelong healthy behaviours in our children and grandchildren. Eating meals together as a family, talking around the dinner table and eating mindfully all role model good behaviours that help our kids and grandkids continue healthy habits into adulthood.

Grandparents are important role models!

Recent studies show that grandparents have a large influence on their grandchildren's food intake. Children tend to eat less discretionary items and more fruit and vegetables when grandparents provide healthy food options, eat healthy themselves and set boundaries around the number of unhealthy meals and snacks children eat. Here are some tips to help integrate healthy habits into your family mealtimes.



### Tips for creating healthy mealtime habits:

- **Sit as a family at the dinner table**

Did you know that families who eat meals together on a regular basis tend to eat more nutritiously? When sitting together, family members eat more healthily compared to when they eat alone. Studies indicate that families who eat more than three meals a week together experience stronger family connections, social skills and health outcomes. Eating together as a family also allows us to teach manners and model the behaviour we would like our children to see.

- **No technology at the table**

Limiting the use of technology during mealtimes can help children reap the social benefits of family conversation. Turning the television off, putting iPads and phones away and sitting away from computer screens can support the development of early social skills. It also teaches children to be more in tune with their hunger signals. Without the distractions of technology, they are better able to notice when they are full which helps to prevent overeating.

- **Drinking milk or water**

Offer milk or water as the drink of choice at family mealtimes. Milk contains calcium and phosphorus that are essential to children's bone growth and development. Water hydrates and helps digestion. Sugar sweetened beverages such as fruit juice, flavoured milk, soft drinks, energy drinks and sports drinks provide excess sugar and kilojoules that are linked to weight gain and tooth decay amongst children.

- **Mindful eating**

You may have grown up being taught to finish all the food on your plate before you were allowed to leave the dinner table. Although there is good intent behind this, it can impair children's ability to recognise when they are full. Children are innately in touch with their hunger signals and body cues. However, when we force children to eat everything on their plate, we slowly teach them to ignore these signals. This can lead to overeating in adulthood. Further, children can develop negative relationships with foods they were once forced to eat when growing up.



## Healthy Mealtime Habits continued...

### How to get started:

- Try starting with a commitment to eat at least one meal together per week
- Opt for a weekend breakfast or lunch if family dinners are hard to eat together
- Promote conversation by asking everyone to share one good and bad thing about their day
- You can use an egg timer for chatty children to help everyone have a chance to talk
- Encourage interest in food by involving children in the meal preparation process; from setting the table and washing fruit and vegetables, to selecting a meal they might want to eat for the week