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## HOW TO: FAMILY MEALS

*"...empower parents to promote children's ability to self-regulate energy intake while providing appropriate structure and boundaries around eating." - Committee on Nutrition of the American Academy of Pediatrics*

### ♥ Have sit-down meals and snacks at regular times

Decide what, when, and where your child will eat. To develop a healthy relationship with food, your child needs you to provide nutritious meals and snacks, at predictable times each day, in a positive environment where eating is a pleasure. Predictable snack and meal times provide your child a sense of food security that discourages overeating. Stop any grazing between snacks and meals so your child comes to the table with an appetite, ready to try different foods.

### ♥ Put a variety of good-tasting, wholesome foods on the table

Serve foods you enjoy making and eating, not foods you feel you are "supposed" to eat but don't enjoy.

### ♥ Teach your child how to serve himself from the foods you have decided to provide

Allow your child to serve himself. Don't plate your child's food for him.

### ♥ Allow your child to choose from among the foods you offer

Trust your child to choose the foods she wants to eat from those you offer. Teach her to politely decline the foods she doesn't want to eat. Do not be her "short order cook," preparing a separate meal for her. Do not subject yourself to an ever-decreasing menu of "kid approved" foods. Your child will learn to eat a variety of foods by following your example.

### ♥ Allow your child to choose how much and how little he will eat of the foods you offer

Trust your child to figure out when he is hungry and when he is full and to eat amounts appropriate for his appetite. If you have been restricting your child's foods, you may go through a period of him overeating before he trusts you will allow him to eat until he is full. If you have been forcing, you may go through a period of food rejection. With time, he will eat according to his appetite.

### ♥ Don't interfere

Interference comes in many forms. Do not negotiate with your child ("if you eat this, then you can have that"). Do not pressure ("you have to try three bites before you decide not to eat it"). Do not beg or bribe your child to eat. Do not demand that your child "clear" his plate. Do not make negative comments to or cast disapproving looks at an overweight child. Do not deny an overweight child food you are offering to others in the family.

Reference: Committee on Nutrition of the American Academy of Pediatrics. Policy Statement: Prevention of Pediatric Overweight and Obesity. (2003). *Pediatrics*, 112(2), 424-430. doi:10.1542/peds.112.2.424 <https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/pediatrics/112/2/424.full.pdf> Retrieved March 14, 2019