



## Importance of Mealtimes

Children can be selective eaters for a variety of reasons. It is important to provide them a variety of food to meet their nutritional needs and promote a peaceful mealtime.

## Sensory Considerations

### Texture

- Crunchy, mushy, chewy, soft, hard, flaky

### Flavor

- Sweet, bitter, sour, spicy, salty, savory,

### Shape

- Round, square, rectangle, triangle, cylinder

### Size

- Crumbs, small, medium, large

### Smell

- Fruity, citrusy, sweet, minty, smokey, spicy, toasty, nutty, herbal, meaty, fresh

### Temperature

- Hot, cold, lukewarm, frozen

It is important for mealtimes to be consistent and predictable for children.



# Environmental Considerations

## Dinning Area

- Consider the child's sensory preferences such as:
  - Lighting (dim or bright)
  - Sound (loud or quiet)
  - Visual (busy or clear)
  - Smell (strong or neutral)

## Seating

- Feet supported
- Child can reach the table

## Dishware

- Age-appropriate utensil size
- Preferred plate, bowl, and cup



# Tips for Introducing Food

## Food Play

- Fun way to become comfortable with new foods without the expectation of eating them
- Play allows for food exploration (touching, smelling, looking, etc.) before it is presented as a meal
- Child may end up putting the food in their mouth, which is a bonus

## Meal Preparation

- Involving the child in cooking when appropriate
- Be in/near the kitchen when meals are preparing to become familiar with various smells, sounds, etc.
- Give the child a job in setting up and/or clean up the table



# Tips for Introducing Food

## Build on Preferred Foods

- Present preferred foods in various ways (i.e. different plate, shape, size)
- Consider current sensory preferences and chose foods that have similar features (i.e. if the child likes chips they may also like other salty, crunchy food such as veggie straws)

## Presentation of New Foods

- Place small portion on or near their plate
- Present as a crumb first and increase size of food over time

When introducing new foods, it's important to have the child feel safe and comfortable.

## How Can an Occupational Therapist Help?

- Develop a mealtime routine for your family
- Support regulation before and during mealtime
- Sensory processing and exploration to become more comfortable with food
- Promote age-appropriate utensil use

**Consult with your occupational therapist for an individualized plan to meet your child's needs**

