



My plan to support my child’s development

Child’s name:		Date of birth:
My goals are:	What I plan to do to achieve these goals:	My progress: Things to discuss with my child’s clinician:
Goal 1		
Goal 2		





Child Development Service



Sitting well for eating and drinking

Sitting in a good position is important for children when eating and drinking. Well supported and stable sitting helps your child focus on:

- breathing
- chewing
- swallowing
- use of their hands to self-feed.

This makes eating and drinking safer, less tiring for your child and more comfortable.

Always watch your child when they are eating.

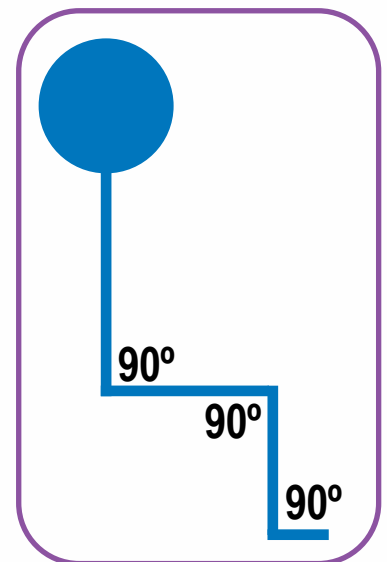
If you aren't sure if your baby is ready to start solid foods, talk to your child health nurse or doctor.

Tips for sitting well for eating and drinking

The best position for eating and drinking is seated in a booster seat, highchair, or chair, depending on your child's age. Aim for your child to have their hips, knees, and ankles as close to a 90° angle (a right angle) as possible with their:

- back tall and supported
- not leaning to one side or another
- feet on floor or on a support
- arms able to rest on a table or tray.

You can use ordinary items that you have at home to adjust your child's seating to help them to sit in this position. If you use items from around your home, they need to be sturdy and secure.



Look at how your child is seated at mealtimes and consider:

- **Are they sitting up straight and tall?**
 - A booster seat/highchair tray or the table top may help to stabilise their body.
 - For babies, you can add support by putting rolled towels on either side of them to prevent them from leaning sideways in their highchair. Before starting solids, it is important that your baby has good head and neck control and can sit up when supported.





- **Are their hips sitting back in the chair (90° angle) and their knees resting over the edge of the chair (90° angle)?**
 - If not, you could put a firm cushion or towel behind their hips and back for support and to bring them forward in their chair so they can bend their knees.
- **Are their feet supported by resting on a surface or footrest, or flat on the floor (90° angle)?**
 - If not, provide a secure base for them to rest their feet on. This will help them to sit upright.
 - You could put a folded towel, books, or a low step under their feet.

■ **Are their arms able to rest on the tray or the table?**

- If not, you can boost your child up in the seat by using a firm cushion, folded towel, or book under their bottom so that their elbows are at the same height as the table.

If you have any concerns about your child's eating or drinking, talk with your child health nurse or Child Development Service clinician.

Notes



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Sensory preferences within food groups

List all the food and drinks you can think of for each of the boxes below.

What my child will eat or drink	Dairy (milk/cheese/yoghurt) and alternatives	Meat/protein foods	Fruit	Vegetables	Other foods	Drinks
Always						
Sometimes						
Never						

The words below describe the sensory properties of food and drinks.

Circle/highlight the words that describe which sensory properties your child prefers. You can also add your own words.

■ **TASTE:** bland, salty, savoury, sweet, sour, spicy _____

■ **TEXTURE:** smooth, consistent, moist, bite/dissolve, crunchy _____

■ **SIGHT:** shape, small amount, separate (on one or more plates) _____

■ **SMELL:** odourless, mild, strong, sweet, savoury, citrus, herbs, meaty, fishy

■ **TOUCH:** none, sticky, powdery (on hands, face, lips) _____

■ **TEMPERATURE:** frozen, icy, cold, room temp., warm, hot _____

■ **COLOUR:** white, brown, bright, colourful _____

Foods I would like my child to eat:

(These could include foods the rest of the family eat, but are not limited to these.)



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Steps to eating a new food

Many parents tell us they just want their child to try a new food!

Your child may be more (or less) sensitive to the smell, sounds, sight, temperature, texture or taste of food, or to their surroundings at mealtimes.

This can make trying new foods very challenging.

Expecting your child to eat even a little piece of a new food the first time you put it on the plate may be too big a step for them.

Try letting your child explore each new food many times, and at their own pace, before they taste it.



Remember there are many small steps to exploring a new food, so every small step forward is a great achievement. These steps might include:

- Being in the same room as the food. Let your child simply see the food without asking them to touch, smell or taste it.
- Present the new food at the table, again without any pressure to try it. Your child might have a closer look at the food, even if it's on the other side of the table.
- Serve the food on a separate plate (maybe yours) and let your child see you eating it.
- Put the food on their plate. They might eventually touch the food with a fork, spoon, finger or another food.
- Ask your child pass the food to another person to eat.
- Let your child bring the food to their nose to smell it – if they don't want to touch it, they can lean down to smell the food.
- Your child might blow on the food, touch it with their lips or teeth, or even touch or taste it with the tip of their tongue.
- When your child is ready to put the new food into their mouth, they may spit it out without chewing it. They might do this a few times, or chew the new food and spit it out again before they're finally ready to chew and swallow.



Stress or pressure at mealtimes makes it hard to learn about a new food, and can decrease your child's appetite.



Positive experiences with food and mealtimes helps children to be more confident with new foods.

How much encouragement should you give?

Some parents tell us that their children like praise and encouragement as they progress with each step, while other children prefer to do it on their own when no one is looking. Even positive pressure (encouragement) can be too much!

Think about what is best for your child.



Things to remember

Start at a step that your child is comfortable and happy with.

Remember, learning about a new food will take time, and even little steps are good progress. Your child might be at a different step, and move at a different pace, with each new food they explore.

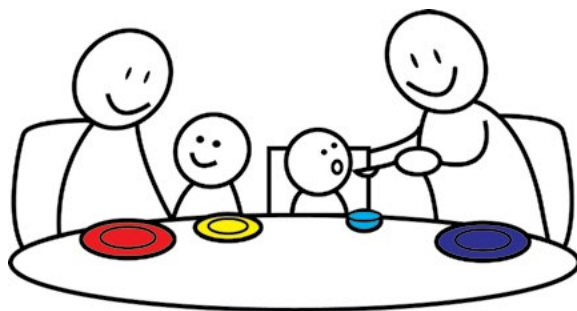
Start with new foods similar to the foods your child does eat. Think about the texture, temperature, smell, taste and colour of the food, and choose something similar.

Food play is another way of letting your child explore a new food, and gradually gain confidence to try it. Set up art and craft activities with foods, and allow your child to poke, prod, pour and play with a new food during playtime. They will learn how the food feels, smells and moves without the pressure to taste it.

Setting the scene for mealtimes

Parents and children have different roles at mealtimes.

Sticking to your role will help create calmer, more enjoyable mealtimes.



Parents

■ Choose and prepare the food.

While you can involve your child in choosing and preparing food, you are in charge of what food is served at each meal and for snacks. Children can become overwhelmed with the responsibility of choosing.

■ Be considerate with your meal choices. As well as serving new foods, **always have something on the table that your child will eat.** Let them choose which foods and how much they will eat. Remember they only have a small stomach!

■ Provide regular meal and snack times. It is important to have a gap between eating so that they can understand being hungry and feeling satisfied (full). This helps them to trust their appetite, and to know that if they decide not to eat a lot, or at all, they will have a chance to eat again soon.

■ Children learn from watching what is happening around them, even at mealtimes. **Eat with your child** if you can. They will learn from watching you and others eat different foods.

■ Trust your child's appetite. This means not trying to get them to eat more or less food, and not adding pressure. This is easier when you have a regular routine of meals and snacks so you know your child will be able to eat something they trusts every 2 or 3 hours. Remember that children need to be well, calm and alert in order for their appetite to be OK.

Children

■ Choose what to eat from what is offered

■ Choose how much to eat based on their own appetite

■ Learn about mealtime behaviours and foods by watching their parents and others eat.

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Playfully exploring food

Some children need to explore food with their senses many times before they will eat it.
If your child will not try new or tricky food, they may be willing to playfully explore it with their senses.

The senses are  sight,  smell,  touch,  taste,  sound,  movement,  body position and  internal body awareness.

Explore food using your child's imagination and your creativity. Pretend to be curious adventurers, detectives or scientists.		Play with food outside snack and mealtimes – times where there is no pressure or expectation for your child to eat.		Allow mess, and get ready for it by covering the bench or floor with cloths or newspaper, going to a play area, or go outside.	
Be playful together with: ■ small amounts of food (like yesterday's leftovers) ■ kitchen utensils (like rolling-pins, mashers, cookie cutters, tongs and containers). ■ washable toys.		Talk about colour, size, shape, smell and feel. Use describing words, such as wet, dry, sticky, slippery, rough or smooth. Ask 'I wonder...': ■ 'I wonder if this feels hard or soft?' ■ 'I wonder what happens when we mix these colours?'		If your child becomes bothered by a sensation, stop immediately. ■ Cover or move the food away. ■ Offer a washcloth or paper towel for wiping their hands.	
Allow time for your child to look, smell and touch the same new or tricky food many times at their pace. 'Think out loud' about what their eyes, nose, hands and body are discovering.		If your child doesn't like touching food directly, put it in a plastic bag. ■ Accept their different sensory preferences. ■ Be curious about their experiences. ■ Show empathy for their feelings.		If your child becomes distressed, sit with them until their emotions move through them and they calm down. Then, ask what their senses noticed and how they feel.	
Consider involving sisters/brothers, relatives or friends, so your child can watch or just listen from another room.		Make sure both you and your child are feeling emotionally calm and not tired.		Always finish with something your child enjoys (like a song, a hug or a story), so your playful exploration ends with safety and delight.	

Remember, this is about play, discovery and connection, not eating.

Success with eating may come after lots of emotionally safe experiences of playfully seeing, smelling and touching new or tricky food.



Where	Activities to try	Food possibilities	Equipment to get ready
Inside			
■ table and chair ■ picnic rug or sheet ■ in the empty bath or shower ■ bench top with a step for your child to stand on	■ Hide food under containers and guess which container it is under. ■ Wrap paper towel or tissues around food like a baby or small animal. ■ Drop or 'post' food into containers. ■ Prepare food for toys to stomp on or pretend to munch (for example cut, slice, chop, grate, roll, mash or mix pieces of food). ■ Make a picture with food on a plate. ■ Make a collage of food on a tray. ■ Use a small pastry or paint brush – or the tail of a dinosaur – or the head of a horse – to paint with hummus, nut spread, pate or yoghurt.	■ legume/bean mix ■ hummus, nut spread, pate, yoghurt ■ boiled eggs ■ cheese ■ cooked chicken, meat or meatballs ■ fruit pieces ■ raw and cooked vegetables ■ cooked pasta shapes ■ crackers	■ washable toy truck, train, car, plane, rocket, dinosaur, farm animal, people or doll ■ small and large containers ■ chopping board, grater, rolling pin, spoon, child-safe knife, tongs, cookie cutters, masher, bowl, pastry or paint brush ■ baking trays or a large plastic plate ■ leftover cake decorations ■ wash cloths or paper towel to wipe their hands ■ small ziplock bags to put food in if your child does not like touching food
Outside			
■ pavement ■ picnic rug or sheet ■ lawn ■ at home or at a park	■ Carry food in a toy truck, train, car, plane, rocket – or on a spoon – to visit the dinosaur, farm animals, or people in the garden or a park. ■ Try to guess if a food, container or object will float or sink in a tub of water. ■ Pretend pieces of food, containers and objects are dropping from the sky like rain into the tub of water. ■ Find things in the garden or the park that match the colour or shape of food.	■ legume/bean mix ■ hard boiled eggs with and without shell ■ fruit pieces ■ raw and cooked vegetables ■ cooked pasta shapes ■ crackers	■ washable toy truck, train, car, plane, rocket, dinosaur, farm animal, people or doll ■ containers and objects that float and sink ■ tub of water ■ wash cloths or paper towel to wipe their hands ■ small ziplock bags to put food in if your child does not like touching food

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Your child's 3-day food and drink record

Please try to complete this food and drink record for 3 days, including 2 weekdays and 1 weekend day.

This helps to identify changes during the week.

Recording what your child eats and drinks can help us see

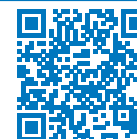
- how much of the food groups your child is having
- what's happening at meal and snack times.

The food and drink record can help you decide which area(s) you'd like to work on.

Tips

- Record information at the time of the meal. Don't wait until later in the day to record information because it becomes less accurate.
- List amounts of food as accurately as possible (such as '1 tablespoon' rather than '3 bites').
- If you're serving a mixed dish such as a casserole, list each food in the casserole.
- Be as descriptive as possible (such as ½ cup mashed banana with some small lumps).
- Include any brand names where relevant.
- Remember to include drinks and snacks.
- Record medication and any supplements (like vitamin tablets).
- It's important to record the times you offered food to your child even if they did not eat anything.
- Remember to include meals eaten away from the house.

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Examples of food and drink records (partly completed)

Time	Where (type of seating)	Food or drink offered	Amount offered (slices, teaspoons, ½ cup, 200ml)	Amount eaten/ drunk	Who fed your child	How long it took	Comments (like who was there, your child's behaviour or mood)
Example of baby food and drink record (morning only)							
Child's name: <i>Ryan</i>							
6.30am	<i>Mum's bed</i>	<i>Breastfeed</i>			<i>Mum</i>	<i>15 mins</i>	<i>Mum, Dad Settled-Fell back to sleep</i>
7.45am	<i>High chair in kitchen</i>	<i>Baby cereal with formula Toast fingers Diluted juice</i>	<i>5 tablespoons 4 150ml</i>	<i>3 tablespoons 3 90ml</i>	<i>Mum Mum and Ryan</i>	<i>15-20 mins</i>	<i>Mum Enjoyed holding toast</i>
7:45am	<i>High chair in kitchen</i>	<i>Stewed apple and vanilla yoghurt</i>	<i>½ cup</i>	<i>¼ cup</i>	<i>Mum</i>	<i>10 mins</i>	<i>Mum, TV on in background</i>
12.30pm	<i>High chair in kitchen</i>	<i>Chicken and veg soup (carrots, peas, potato, celery) Rusk Breastfeed</i>	<i>½ cup 1</i>	<i>½ cup ½</i>	<i>Mum Ryan</i>		<i>Enjoyed watching TV while eating</i>
Example of toddler food and drink record (afternoon and evening only)							
Child's name: <i>James</i>							
3.00pm	<i>Child's table and chair outside</i>	<i>Fruit salad (apple, banana, orange, pear) Vanilla yoghurt Water</i>	<i>½ cup ½ cup 200ml</i>	<i>All All 100ml</i>	<i>James</i>	<i>10 mins</i>	<i>Mum</i>
5.30pm	<i>High chair at dining table</i>	<i>Ravioli Soft carrot and bean sticks Toast</i>	<i>¾ cup 8 1 slice</i>	<i>½ cup 5 1 slice</i>	<i>James</i>	<i>25 mins</i>	<i>Mum, Dad, baby sister Dropped toast on floor</i>
7.15pm	<i>Lounge room couch</i>	<i>Milk in sipper cup</i>	<i>250ml</i>	<i>230ml</i>	<i>James</i>	<i>10 mins</i>	<i>Mum, Dad, baby sister</i>

Day 1 food and drink record

Child's name:				Date:		Day:	
Time	Where (type of seating)	Food or drink offered	Amount offered (slices, teaspoons, ½ cup, 200ml)	Amount eaten/ drunk	Who fed your child	How long it took	Comments (like who was there, your child's behaviour or mood)

Day 2 food and drink record

Child's name:				Date:		Day:	
Time	Where (type of seating)	Food or drink offered	Amount offered (slices, teaspoons, ½ cup, 200ml)	Amount eaten/ drunk	Who fed your child	How long it took	Comments (like who was there, your child's behaviour or mood)

Day 3 food and drink record

Child's name:				Date:		Day:	
Time	Where (type of seating)	Food or drink offered	Amount offered (slices, teaspoons, ½ cup, 200ml)	Amount eaten/ drunk	Who fed your child	How long it took	Comments (like who was there, your child's behaviour or mood)



Child Development Service



Resources shared in the mealtimes package

Module 2: Understanding the puzzle of mealtimes

 Seating for eating (video)	Learn to eat. Love to eat
Choking First Aid	Raising Children Network
 Choking First Aid Webinar	Family First Aid

Module 3: Caregiver and child roles at mealtimes

 Enjoying family mealtimes (video)	Ellen Barron Family Centre, Children's Health Queensland
Enjoyable Mealtimes factsheets English , and translated into Korean , Chinese and Vietnamese .	Sydney Local Health District

Module 4: Working towards positive mealtimes

Big Life Journal (Angry outbursts image)	Big Life Journal
 Hand Model of the Brain (video)	Emotion Coaching UK
 Circle of Security International – Connection (video)	Circle of Security International
Circle of Security	Circle of Security International
Connected Parenting ELearning: St John of God Social Outreach and Child and Adolescent Community Health	St John of God Social Outreach and Child and Adolescent Community Health
Child Health Nurse appointments	Child and Adolescent Health Service
NGALA	NGALA
Tuning into Kids	Tuning into Kids
Parenting Connection	Parenting Connection
Triple P Parenting	Triple P Parenting
Bringing up Great Kids	Bringing up Great Kids
The Brave Program	The Brave Program
Connected Parenting	Connected Parenting

Module 6: How to introduce new or tricky food

 Feeding (video)	Sussex Community NHS Foundation Trust
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Module 7: Nutrition information

Australian Guide to Healthy Eating	Eatforhealth.gov.au
Recommended Serve Sizes	NSW Child Safety Hub
Healthy drinks for children	Raising Children Network
Healthy snack and drink ideas	Tasmanian Government Public Health Services
Nutritious snacks and meals for Toddlers , Preschoolers or School Aged Children	Raising Children Network
Ideas for when Toddlers aren't eating much and Healthy eating habits for children (1–8 years)	Raising Children Network
Iron rich foods for babies and growing children	Queensland Government
A guide to iron rich foods	MLA Healthy Meals
Baby Friendly Meals	MLA Healthy Meals
The Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne constipation resources – translated into various languages	The Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne

Supplementary Resources (these do not appear in the Mealtimes online learning package)

 Understanding Sensory Processing: 8 Senses (video)  Explains how we use different senses, beyond just sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell, to understand and react to the world around us. It helps parents understand how sensory processing affects behaviour and everyday activities. Includes resources designed for Aboriginal families.	Positive Partnerships
 Responsive feeding: Enjoying mealtimes (video) How to make mealtimes more relaxed and positive by tuning into a child's hunger cues, offering food without pressure, and creating a calm, enjoyable atmosphere.	Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne
 Online self-directed learning (video) Helping you manage mealtimes challenges in young children.	Women, Youth and Children Community Nutrition Service – Nutrition
 Grow and Go Toolbox Resources, tools, and strategies for parents to support their child's social-emotional development, learning, and everyday challenges. It offers practical advice to encourage positive behaviours and strengthen the parent-child relationship. Includes resources designed for Aboriginal families	Grow & Go Toolbox: Helping Feed Under Fives
 Bright Tomorrows (app) Parenting app for children aged 0–5 that gives fun, everyday ideas, based on science, to help build children's attention, emotional skills, relationships, routines and problem-solving. For mealtime ideas, look for 'Fuel and Flourish' and 'Nurturing Minds' under the 'growth' tab.	The Kids Research Institute Australia
 The Journey to Eating (video) Helping children accept new and different foods is a gradual process of exploration – starting with seeing, smelling or touching new foods and only later encouraging taste – so mealtimes remain calm and pressure-free.	Learn to eat. Love to eat.

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