

# BUILDING HEALTHY MEALTIME ROUTINES

Kimberly Capulong, OTDS



## OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY'S ROLE

Occupational therapists recognize the importance of mealtimes, as eating and feeding are two fundamental ADLs. In order to function well in life, our basic human needs must be met. OT's role is to promote participation of all children and their families in everyday occupations, which includes mealtime routines (Doll, 2014).

## IMPORTANCE OF MEALTIMES

According to Case-Smith & O'Brien (2015), mealtimes provide one with a "routine and structure" and allow time for relaxation, communication, and socialization.

Moreover, mealtimes are cultural rituals and are integral part of family life and time for bonding and sharing (p. 393).



## HOW TO BUILD HEALTHY MEALTIME ROUTINES:

Schedule Snacks  
and Meals

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Children benefit from routines, as they create predictability in their day in which they know what to expect from meals and snacks. Additionally, Case-Smith & O'Brien (2015) assert that consistently schedules meals and snacks allow for the child to experience a period of time without eating, which may promote hunger cues and more interest in eating.

# HOW TO BUILD HEALTHY MEALTIME ROUTINES (CONT.):

## Eliminate Distractions 2

Wandering around while eating or having meals in different locations every day may be distracting for young children and does not promote positive mealtime behaviors (Case-Smith & O'Brien, 2015). Mealtimes sitting at a table with no TV or electronics can help send the message that mealtimes are for eating and socializing (Doll, 2014).

## Meal Prep 3

Children are more likely to eat what they make; therefore, it is beneficial to increase participation and responsibilities when it comes to mealtimes. Be creative and include children in preparing meals whenever possible. This can include meal preparation (e.g., chopping veggies, cooking), food shopping, setting the table, or cleaning up (Doll, 2014).

## Eating Together 4

According to the CDC (2021), sitting down as a family for mealtime can teach your child how to eat and help to promote the development of social skills. Additionally, family style meals promote social participation. Parents have identified benefits to shared family mealtimes, including good teaching moments, enhanced family connectedness, and encouraging nutritious meals (Quick et al., 2011).

## Modelling 5

A major determinant of human eating behavior is social modeling (Crewys et al, 2014). Liu & Stein (2013) asserted that children observe their family members and mimic their eating choices and behaviors. Parents and caregivers can model appropriate table manners to help their kids learn positive mealtime behaviors, such sitting at the table or chewing with their mouths closed.

## REFERENCES

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