

How to keep food and mealtimes normal for your kids

By Devon Gere, OTR/L, Occupational Therapist

Food – creating it, eating it, and, most importantly having fun/enjoying it. First, you'll find some helpful information and then an activity to do with your kids.

Information:

How to keep food and mealtimes 'normal' when aspects of life may be different than how they typically are:

1. Set specific times and locations for meals and snacks. Perhaps food only occurs at the table or high chair and during breaks from schoolwork for older kids. In fact, having a daily routine for school-age kids used to having their routine laid out for them at school can be a big help for continuity and for things feeling familiar.

Occupational therapist

Devon's Gere's 6th grade daughter wrote out an outline of what her typical school day looks like and then filled in those same times with activities and lessons to do at home.

She included plenty of recess and lots of time for food and play breaks too because...of course! With older kids you're likely to get more buy-in and follow-through if they help create it too.

2. Have kids of all ages help in the kitchen! The more involved kids are in the preparation of food, the more likely they are to be interested in potentially trying and even eating a food. Food prep also allows for incorporating fine motor activities (ripping, stirring, cutting, etc.), counting and math (number of eggs for little kids up to measuring cups and conversions for older kids), following directions and sequencing,

language development when talking about the food (ex. this lettuce is green and smooth!), and connecting as a family!

3. Let the child(ren) help with the menu: another way to increase buy-in, excitement about a meal, and fun, is to allow children to have a say in some aspect of what is presented. Sometimes that looks like: "we're having noodles tonight! Do you want the bat-man noodles or the alphabet noodles?" or it may be "Friday is family night! Do you want to do pizza or thai food for our family

night?" Sometimes it can even be, "you can pick which of the desserts we currently have for our evening snack tonight".

The more control children (and people in general) feel that they have, the more likely they are to go along with the idea. You'll notice that in all three of those scenarios, the parent is still in charge of the options presented!



Keep mealtimes normal

(continued)

How to make food fun (top 3 suggestions):

1. Be creative in presentation – whether you do a meal on a picnic blanket in the backyard or eat snacks out of Easter eggs, presentation can be a total game changer!
2. Model ways of being silly with the food and see what they'll copy – can you 'sneeze' the food off of your nose? What about knocking over a tower of cucumber slices or using yogurt and an apple half to create stamp art?
3. Work your way up in terms of interactions – look > touch > smell > kiss > lick > bite > swallow. Even if your child isn't ready to swallow a food yet, they can still interact with foods in a variety of ways. *

Activity

Devon Gere's daughter used to be quite the picky eater and one food that she had a challenging time with was beans. We quickly figured out that it was not necessarily the taste of the bean but more the texture that seemed to bother her. Easy fix! Prepare beans in a different way, keep the great protein source, and prove a point that she may not like a specific way a food is prepared but that doesn't necessarily mean she doesn't like the actual food.



We made black bean brownie muffins and she loved them! You'll find that same recipe linked below. Most, if not all, of the ingredients are pantry staples so hopefully you'll already have them and don't need to brave a grocery store for anything. Get the kids involved with everything from measuring for the older kids to pressing the blend button for your toddler and have fun!

Link to the actual recipe: https://kristineskitchenblog.com/chocolate-black-bean-blender-muffins-high-protein/?fbclid=IwAR2_wPopsnVTJiEiXubxeQNKqiZxD-JwimRL9-4Teci0UIiwZITgWrqqt-g

Finding the Positive

As parents and caregivers, we often give all of ourselves to our kids before looking at what we may need. Today we challenge parents to carve out a time to do something meaningful to you. That can be: taking an extra-long shower with your favorite shower gel, chatting on the phone with a

friend for 10 minutes, or even just shutting the door while you go to the bathroom so you have a moment of privacy from small people. Even if it only lasts a couple minutes, find a way to do something just for you!

* Concepts from SOS Feeding