

# FAMILY STYLE MEAL BASICS



**Use the Division of Responsibility (DOR).** Take on the job of deciding what foods you will serve, where you will serve them (kitchen table, preferably), and when you will serve them. Let your child decide whether he will eat what you've provided, and how much he will eat.

**Ditch the Plate Method.** Serve meals family-style by placing food items on platters or in bowls. Passing food around the table, aka "Walton-style" allows your child to refuse food or take an amount that is right for him. Plating foods for your child takes control away from him, and makes you the regulator of what and how much is eaten. This may sabotage your child's ability to learn self-regulation, a necessary tool for achieving and maintaining a healthy weight. Be sure to include one or two food items that you know your child likes and is comfortable eating. Aim to represent all of the food groups to promote a nutrient dense meal and expose your child to a variety of foods.

**Trust Your Child.** Ultimately, you want your child to figure out when they are hungry and when they are full, and the amounts of food they eat should reflect their appetite. It is natural for children to miss the mark on eating: overeating and under-eating is part of figuring out what works for your body. Help your child figure out what works for him in a trusting environment.

**Be Predictable and Consistent.** Use your structure to develop a rhythmic and timely pattern to meals and snacks, and be consistent. Predictability and consistency helps your child keep hunger in check, be more relaxed about eating, and less fixated on food.

**No Comments about Food and Eating Performance.** Children don't need to be pressured about eating or not eating... and the more you lay it on, the more self-conscious and bad your child feels, which may trigger overeating or not eating at all.

**Offer Two Choices not Ultimatums.** This works well for toddlers and older kids. Giving choices, but not too many, allows your child to make good decisions about food and feel in control of their body and their eating.

**Keep the Pleasantries.** Meal times should be pleasant, supportive, and engaging. Manners should be taught and used. Keeping a positive attitude and reasonable expectations around mealtime manners, conversation, and interactions among family members will go a long way toward creating a mealtime environment in which your child wants to be a part.

Getting started with family style meals is exciting! Use this guide to help you create a **stress-free, fun, and healthy** eating environment for the whole family.

**Sit down and eat together as often as you can!** Research indicates that at least three to five family meals per week may improve grades, reduce risk-taking behaviors, and prevent obesity and eating disorders in older children.