



## Managing mealtimes and CF

For all children mealtimes can be challenging. Throughout toddler and early childhood years, children are still:

### 1. *Learning about foods*

When it comes to mealtimes, more demands are often placed on children with CF due to their greater recommended calorie intake. However, research shows that mealtimes should be low pressure/stress environments where children can feel safe to explore foods as they are ready through touch, taste and smell. It is a natural and developmentally appropriate reaction for children to be hesitant when they see new foods. Research suggests it may take up to 20 attempts of trying a new food on their plate before a child accepts a food.

A good way to keep children interested in eating is to involve them in meal planning. Some examples of this could be to have your child give meal suggestions for dinners during the week or consider taking them grocery shopping to pick out new foods to try.

Getting children involved in meal preparation is also helpful. When they are younger this could be as simple as setting the table or washing the vegetables. As they get older they can help more in cooking the meals.

It can also be overwhelming to have a plate full with a mountain of food, so you could try:

- Using a learning plate for new or less preferred food, placed to the side of their normal dinner plate.
- Serve meals in “courses” or placing a smaller portion of food on your child’s plate will make it achievable to eat, and then when finished you can add more.

### 2. *Learning about mealtimes, expectations and routines*

Children are motivated to copy others, so modelling good eating behaviours from a young age might be helpful.

Some suggestions used to encourage good eating behaviours could be:

- Eat together as a family when possible and model the eating habits you want to see. This helps your child learn how to use cutlery, how to take turns when talking, how to try a variety of foods and more!
- Eat the same foods that your child has on their plate.
- Be excited about trying new foods and eating properly.
- Have the same eating expectations on all children.
- Giving positive attention and clear praise for any good attempts at eating or exploring the food (through looking, touching, smelling, interacting, and tasting),
- Calmly ignoring behaviours you don't want to see.
- Having conversations at dinner time that don't involve food.



It may be helpful to try giving your child their 'big meal' of the day when they aren't tired and utilise snacks as much as possible throughout the day. Tired children often don't eat well and therefore if you can pick when their hunger level is highest, you may have more success. This can also be a good time to introduce new foods.

Setting aside regular times for family meals can help children get into a good eating routine as mealtimes become more predictable. You're also less likely to forget medicine if you have a consistent schedule. We also find that preparing children ahead of time for meals gives them time to get into the right frame of mind to eat. For example:

- Give your child notice 5 to 10 minutes before meals by saying, "*Jesse, dinner will be ready soon, you have time for one more game*".

Allowing 20-30 minutes for family meals gives everyone plenty of time to eat. Children will have the chance to try new foods and develop good eating habits. If you are finding it challenging for your child to finish their meal in this time, it may be helpful to break up meal time, allowing for child to come back to the table 15 minutes later.

### 3. Learning about their needs

Due to the high calorie requirements for CF, mealtimes can become stressful as parents work to ensure their children are meeting their recommended daily intake. When mealtimes become stressful, our bodies release the hormone adrenaline, which reduces our appetite. There are some tricks for getting more bang for your buck in terms of mealtimes, such as:

- Increasing the amount of dairy, nuts, fat, vegetables and oil in their food.
- Early supplementation (e.g. liquid form with high calorie intake).

If you're concerned or not sure about how you can increase the amount of calories in your child's food, you're not alone. Your QCH CF Dietician sees many families in similar situations and is happy to explore this with you.

#### Additional resources: Managing mealtimes

- App: "Easy Diet Diary" helps with working out enzyme control
- Triple P parenting program, currently free online for Queensland parents
  - [http://www.triplep-parenting.net.au/qld-uken/find-help/triple-p-online/toddlers-to-tweens/?itb=52aa16fc56779ac9b2ae91a8b47927ba&gclid=CjwKCAjw0qLOBRBUeIwAMG5xMGqaHBPRf77XDi-GKq23LE1z7cwzgNak13t8yLjNlpb3B7izkOoNhoCmH8QAvD\\_BwE](http://www.triplep-parenting.net.au/qld-uken/find-help/triple-p-online/toddlers-to-tweens/?itb=52aa16fc56779ac9b2ae91a8b47927ba&gclid=CjwKCAjw0qLOBRBUeIwAMG5xMGqaHBPRf77XDi-GKq23LE1z7cwzgNak13t8yLjNlpb3B7izkOoNhoCmH8QAvD_BwE)
- Love & Logic parenting program
  - <https://www.loveandlogic.com>
- Eating family meals with toddlers
  - [http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/eating\\_with\\_toddlers.html](http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/eating_with_toddlers.html)
- Making family meals enjoyable: six tips
  - <http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/mealtimes.html>
- Caring for Your Toddler & Pre-schooler: A Parent's Guide to Healthy Living with Cystic Fibrosis
  - <http://www.parentingchildrenwithhealthissues.com/LivingCFPamphlets.html>
- Food Issues & Picky Eating – Tips for CF Parents
  - <http://www.happyheartfamilies.com/FoodIssues.html>



- Videos from Raisingchildren.net.au:
  - [http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/making\\_dinner\\_with\\_kids\\_video.html](http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/making_dinner_with_kids_video.html)
  - [http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/making\\_healthy\\_foods\\_fun\\_video.html](http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/making_healthy_foods_fun_video.html)
  - [http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/setting\\_example\\_healthy\\_food\\_video.html](http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/setting_example_healthy_food_video.html)
  - [http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/encouraging\\_behaviour\\_video.html](http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/encouraging_behaviour_video.html)
- Ask your QCH Occupational Therapist and/or Dietician for additional resources such as:
  - Social stories and additional strategies to help your child with mealtimes

