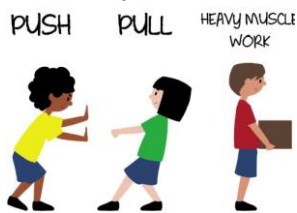




Meal times

- At mealtimes, use favourite smells and tastes and offer familiar foods frequently. Offer food changes in just noticeable differences and introduce new foods gradually.
- Ensure your child is sat in a supported position with feet on a stable flat surface, with ankles knees and hips at 90 degrees.
- Prior to mealtime /activities requiring oral input, carry out a range of muscle work activities to activate proprioceptors in your child's muscles to have a calming effect on their sensory systems i.e. heavy pushing and pulling / outdoor activity for 20 mins prior to lunch or snack. (See 'Heavy Muscle Work' activity sheet for more ideas).



- Wash hands and face before eating – this will become routine and remind the child that it is time to eat but will also provide tactile feedback around the hands and mouth to prepare for eating. Firm pressure can be more easily tolerated therefore, when wiping face press firmly around the mouth first with warm flannel to desensitise.



- If your child dislikes foods being mixed together on a plate, purchase a plate with dividers.
- Allow enough time – try not to put extra pressure on your child by rushing them at mealtimes – if appropriate demonstrate the time available to them in visual form e.g. egg timer or clock so that the child knows they don't need to rush.
- Encourage your child to participate in the preparation of foods. Try making foods for other people i.e. squeezing oranges to make a juice for a member of the family or make your own pizza. Decorate family pizzas with different toppings so that your child is handling food without the pressure to eat or try. Children usually need to handle food first, without the pressure to try them. Make food related activities and cooking fun for your child to join in with you.
- Limit the number of food choices per meal to 2 or 3. Too many may be too overwhelming.
- Developing feeding and eating skills can be a slow process – keep in mind changes occurring as small steps.



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- Try out fun play and craft activities with foods away from mealtimes i.e. paint with yoghurt, dip a cut apple/potato in paint and print on paper, decorate a potato with other food objects (make your own Mr Potato head or vegetable creature), make popcorn decorations by threading onto strings, look on the internet to find other food related fun activities.



- Encourage your child to feed you a non-preferred food i.e. grapes and strawberries so that they are handling the food and seeing how much you are enjoying it.
- Try growing foods – fruit or veg in the garden and picking them to add to family meals.



- Place a heavy beanbag or a weighted lap pad on your child's lap whilst they are eating which can help to promote a feeling of calm.
- Try weighted utensils to increase sensory awareness in the hands, e.g. 'Good Grips'. (See image to the right).
- Try changing food textures by freezing, shredding or mashing.
- Consider the environment e.g. lighting, background noise, temperature, cooking smells.



- Further reading – Sensory Integration – Answers for Mealtime Success – available from www.paediatrictherapynetwork.org and www.sensoryintergration.org.uk
- Encourage activities which involve using mouth muscles during the day such as; drinking through a curly straw or sports cap bottle, mini windmills, blow football (with cotton wool ball and straws), blowing up balloons, silent whistle toys, blow pipes,

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blow pens, playing instruments such as a harmonica (which is a more mellow sound than for example a recorder), pulling funny faces.



- Experiment with minimal and graded alteration to already accepted foods e.g. grated cheese instead of sliced.
- Experiment with changing texture/temp of already accepted foods e.g. freezing smoothies or milkshakes, toasting cheese sandwiches.
- Continue to offer opportunities for your child to be exposed to different foods, again without any expectation to try, e.g. encourage them to engage in activities such as playdough, drawing in the kitchen whilst you are preparing meals so that they are exposed to the smells/appearance of new foods.
- Continue to encourage and offer opportunities to participate in food preparation, with no expectation for them to taste the food prepared e.g. helping to chop salad for parents, stir cake mixture etc.



- Continue to encourage wide variety of craft/messy play activities, e.g. playdough, clay, paint, drawing, cutting/sticking, craft with natural materials. (See 'Graded Approach to Messy Play sheet').



- Prior to mealtimes or situations which your child finds more challenging, encourage them to engage in an activity involving proprioception, which has a calming effect on the sensory systems. Examples of activities involving proprioception include: activities involving 'resistance' work for the muscles, e.g. pushing/pulling – (pulling washing out of washing machine, pushing wheelbarrow, shopping trolley, wall push-ups, pretending to push the wall down etc.) , lifting (carrying books to give out in class, helping to carry the shopping bags), activities such as swimming, yoga, dance, climbing, obstacle courses.



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