

# Make Mealtime Matter

As a caregiver, you play an important role in shaping the food habits of children in your care. Most food preferences and dietary habits are established during childhood. You have the opportunity to ensure that children are given healthy choices when in your care. The quality of food offered and attitudes toward food that you convey at mealtimes can influence children's food behaviors. Be a healthy role model for the children you care for.

- **Regular meal and snack times and places**— try to have meals & snacks at a scheduled times and places every day.
- **Family-style meals**— children like to eat with other people. It also helps children learn feeding and social skills.
- **Don't be a member of the “clean your plate club”** - encourage children to listen to their tummy. Ask what their tummy says, is it full or hungry?
- **Turn off the TV**— mealtime should be social & allow for sharing.
- **Hand washing**— encourage children to wash hands before they come to the table.
- **Offer a variety of healthy foods**— children feel empowered when they get to choose what they eat.
- **Serve small portions**— children don't need as much food as adults. Serve small portions and let them ask for more.
- **Involve children**— let them set the table and if age appropriate, pour their own drink and serve themselves.
- **Make mealtimes pleasant**— it is not a time for scolding. Make it a positive time with conversation and sharing.
- **Be a good role model**— eat a variety of healthy foods yourself. Children will be more likely to try a food if you eat it too!

