

Ages and Stages

This chart will help you see how feeding changes as children grow and what you can do to help your child develop healthy eating habits.

	What your child can do	What you can do	What your child is learning
Birth to 12 Months	(from birth) Show you when she is hungry or full by using her voice, face and actions—like turning away from the breast or bottle when full or crying when hungry.	Respond to her signals: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feed your child when she shows signs of being hungry. • Help her calm down so she can focus on eating. • Hold your baby during feedings and make eye contact. • Stop feeding when she shows she is full. • Try to avoid feeding your child every time she cries. She may not be hungry. She may just need comfort. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To trust that you will meet her needs. • That she is a good communicator. • That her parents are listening to her. • That she is important to you. • To eat and sleep in a predictable pattern. • To calm herself (with your help). • That milk (or food) is for nutrition, not for comfort.
	(Starting at 6 months) Sit up. Learn to eat with his fingers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Start using a high chair if you choose. • Create family mealtimes. • Start with semi-solid food from the spoon. Move to thicker and lumpier foods then to soft pieces of food. • Offer safe finger foods so he can practice feeding himself. • Turn off the TV during mealtimes. This is a time for interacting and sharing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To feed himself. • To decide how much to eat. • To know the tastes and textures he likes and doesn't like. • To focus on eating during mealtimes. • That eating and mealtimes are fun and feel good.
12 to 24 Months	Feed herself many different foods. May begin learning to use a baby-safe fork and spoon or other utensils, such as chopsticks.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer 3-4 healthy choices during mealtimes. • Offer 2-3 healthy snacks a day. • Offer foods that can be picked up, chewed or gummed, and swallowed easily. (Be sure to watch your child closely and avoid foods that are choking hazards.) • Offer child-size utensils and provide help when needed, if you want your child to learn to feed herself. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To try new foods. • To do things for herself. • To ask for help. • To trust that you will help her when she is struggling.
	Use actions and words to communicate his thoughts and feelings. This includes showing or "telling" you what he wants and doesn't want, and when he is hungry or full.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make meals a time for connecting with your child. • Point to and say the names of foods or objects on the table. • Talk about things besides food—what you see outside the window or what you and your child did that day. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New words. • That he can effectively communicate to you when he is hungry or full. • That you will listen to and respect him. • That his feelings matter.
24 to 36 Months	Choose which foods to eat.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Try not to prepare separate meals for your child. Instead, offer 3-4 healthy choices during mealtimes, <i>including ones your child likes</i>. • Offer 2-3 healthy snacks a day. • Let your child see you making healthy eating choices. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To make healthy food choices as she grows. • That she knows her own body. • To eat when she is hungry and stop when she is full.
	Use words to express his thoughts and feelings.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talk with your child. • Ask questions and listen to what he has to say. Use words to help him describe his ideas, feelings, and experiences. • Encourage polite behavior. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New words • That mealtime is fun. • That his ideas matter. • Good behavior at the table.
	Help out during mealtime.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer simple tasks like putting napkins on the table, placing pre-cut vegetables in the salad, or helping to mix batter. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That she is an important member of the family. • That she is very capable. • That helping others feels good.