

Feeding Young Children in Group Settings

When children eat in group settings, it is much more than just a meal; it's a learning opportunity. Children can learn many important life skills in a family style meal service. Adults play a big role in this experience. Adults are responsible for setting a comfortable feeding and eating environment. Adults help children learn to pass bowls and select appropriate amounts when serving themselves. Mealtime is also an important time to develop social skills.

Eating Environment

To ensure the eating environment is relaxed

- locate mealtime tables away from the flow of activities such as handwashing, toileting, diapering, and setting up for nap time.
- the sounds in the room are mostly those related to the mealtime.
- allow no background noise, clutter on the table, or adults getting up and down from the table.

Young children are learning to control their muscles, especially their hand muscles. They need plenty of space to

- balance food, drink, and eating utensils.
- make sure there is adequate space provided for each child to pass, serve, pour, and eat.
- place furniture so the children can sit, rise, and walk around the table without interfering with others at the table.



- move the high chairs close enough that the little ones can see what's going on and be a part of the mealtime experience.



Mealtime Memo FOR CHILD CARE

Adult Practices at Mealtime

Adults set the eating environment for children. Adults are role models for using utensils, choosing and eating foods, and behaving in socially acceptable ways at the table. They help shape children's eating behavior. Knowing this, it is best to sit at the table and eat the same food as the children. Lead conversations and have some light topics to talk about. This is an opportunity to talk about food and nutrition concepts, such as texture and appearance. Explain how food gives them energy, helps them grow, and keeps them healthy.

While it is important to encourage healthy eating and an open attitude about new foods, it is equally important to never lecture children during mealtimes. Do not point out how much or how little of foods one is eating. While observing the children eat or try new foods, you must accept the children's reactions to foods. Never insist on "one bite" or "eat all of this before you eat any of that." Adults should never make negative comments about the foods served. Children will take their cues from adults and refuse to try a new food if the adult says negative things about it. If there is nothing good to say, don't say anything.

Adults Roles in Community Building

Adults set an eating environment that helps children develop a sense of community around mealtimes. They take turns with each other and share thoughts and activities. They learn to help each other and show respect.

To accomplish this, it is important that the mealtime conversations include all children. This means that the children are seated around tables where they can see each other to communicate easily. Encourage taking turns in conversations.

Let the children serve themselves. As children first serve themselves in family style service, they begin to use skills for passing bowls and selecting amounts. Helping the children take turns in passing food also teaches the children to share and help each other.



Recipe to Try

Great recipe to get children to eat their lunch.

Beef-Turkey Loaf D-04¹

Raw ground beef (no more than 20% fat)	1 lb 4 oz	Frozen whole eggs, thawed	1 cup 3 Tbsp
		OR	OR
Raw ground turkey	1 lb 4 oz	Fresh large eggs	6 each
Fresh onions, chopped	½ cup	Canned tomato sauce	1 ¼ cups
OR	OR	Canned tomato paste	2 Tbsp
Dehydrated onions	3 Tbsp	Worcestershire sauce	1 Tbsp 1 tsp
Fresh celery, ¼" diced	2 cups	Salt	2 tsp
Rolled oats	2 ⅔ tsp	Ground black or white pepper	1 tsp
Enriched dry bread crumbs	1 cup		

In a mixing bowl, using the paddle attachment combine all ingredients, mix on low speed for 5 minutes until blended.

Press 5 lb 4 oz meat mixture into each pan (9 x 13 x 2 inch). For 25 servings, use 1 pan.

Bake: Conventional oven: 350 °F for 60 minutes

Convection oven: 325 °F for 50 minutes

CCP: Heat to 165 °F or higher for at least 15 seconds.

CCP: Hold for hot service at 135 °F or higher.

Number of servings: 25

Serving size: 1 piece provides the equivalent of 1 ½ oz of cooked lean meat, ⅓ cup vegetables, and the equivalent of ½ slice of bread.

¹USDA Recipes for Child Care. Available online at www.nfsmi.org.

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Breakfast Menus

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Diced pears Whole-grain toast with all-fruit spread Milk	Orange sections Baked Whole Wheat Doughnut A-07 ¹ Milk	Banana slices Unsweetened whole-grain cereal variety Milk	Apricot halves Whole-grain waffle Milk	Orange juice Whole-grain English muffin with fruit flavored cream cheese ² Milk

Lunch Menus

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Beef-Turkey Loaf D-04 ¹ Steamed yellow squash Peach halves Milk	Spanish Quiche D-08A ¹ Steamed broccoli Milk	Chicken on whole- wheat pita with roasted chicken, cheddar cheese, and lettuce Mixed fruit Milk	Roasted turkey on whole-wheat bread Broccoli Cheese Soup H-05 ¹ Apple slices Milk	Split Pea Soup H-02 ¹ Carrots and peas Pear slices Corn Muffin A-02 ¹ Milk

Snack Menus

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Banana half with Yogurt Fruit Dip G-04 ¹ Water ⁴	Peach Muffin Squares A-16A ¹ Milk Water ⁴	Lowfat cottage cheese Pineapple tidbits Water ⁴	Fruit kebob with apple and banana slices Graham crackers Water ⁴	Lowfat yogurt, plain Diced peaches Water ⁴

¹USDA Recipes for Child Care. Available online at www.nfsmi.org.

²Cream cheese is used for flavor. Cream cheese is not creditable on the CACFP.

³Sunflower butter can be substituted for peanut butter.

⁴Water is suggested as a beverage for all snacks even when other beverages are offered to encourage children to drink water.

Sources

University of Idaho College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, Retrieved August 3, 2009, from Feeding Young Children in Group Settings Web site: www.cals.uidaho.edu/feeding/index.htm

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