



Children'sSM
Healthcare of Atlanta

The No-Stress Way to Feed Your Preschooler

Ages three to five

When your child was a baby, he showed you little peeks at his personality. Now that he's a preschooler, he's really his own (little) man. Welcome to the age of big growth and non-stop energy. No mystery why eating time can be a real event! The good news is that most preschoolers like to help and even take pride in doing a good job. That makes each of our jobs for mealtime—the Ps and Cs—much easier to follow.

Parent's jobs—the 3 Ps

Plan for a positive eating experience

- **Plan ahead** — Serve three meals and two to three snacks at the same time every day.
- **Focus on the family** — The toys and TV can wait. Make a real effort to sit together at the table as a family, without electronics or other distractions.
- **Talk it up** — Make pleasant conversation at mealtime and show your child that food, family and fun go together.

Prepare and put food on the table

- **Stick with water or milk** — Juice and sugary drinks (soda, tea, sports drinks or lemonade) provide little-to-no nutritional value. Only offer water or milk with snacks or mealtime.
- **Get help** — Kids feel important when they can help make food and help set the table. Plus, they're more likely to eat something they helped make.

Provide with patience

- **"All by myself"** — Let him feed himself with a fork (or fingers if he wants to). Help out only if he asks for it.
- **Please and thank you** — Calmly teach table manners, but be patient because these skills take time to develop.
- **Offer, offer, offer** — Continue to serve new foods and foods your child previously claimed not to like. Some children need to see a new food 10-15 times before deciding to try it.



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Child's jobs—the 3 Cs

Choose to eat

- **Stop and go** — Preschoolers might gobble down their food one day and be less interested in eating dinner the next day. Don't worry. His body knows what it needs.

Choose what to eat (from what you provide)

- **Give, don't force** — Offer, but don't pressure your child to try each food on his plate.
- **It's normal** — Kids will want to eat seconds of a food one day and refuse the same food the next. Dish up a variety of healthy foods and let him choose what he wants to eat that day.
- **Don't be a short-order cook** — If your child chooses not to eat what you offer, don't break down and make a new meal. Just remind your preschooler when the next meal or snack time is and offer only water in between.

Choose how much to eat

- **Still hungry?** — You provided a healthy meal, so allow him to have more of any food you've prepared, even if he didn't finish everything on his plate.
- **Avoid bad habits** — Forcing your child to clean his plate now can lead to overeating later.

Teach your preschooler about good health and nutritious food

- Build a little excitement around good food. Invite your preschooler to pick out a new veggie or fruit at the grocery store or farmers market. Learn together how that food is good for our bodies.
- Preschoolers love to help! Let him wash the veggies, spread nut butter on bread and stir together ingredients.
- Tell your child that choosing healthy foods will help his body grow stronger and healthier.

Remember, *how we feed our families is just as important as what we feed our families.*

As your preschooler settles into his place in the world, a little work (sprinkled with a large dose of patience) goes a long way in helping him discover choosing good food and good health. Strong4Life's Ps and Cs take the stress out of mealtime and pave the way for happier, healthier families today!