

Mastering Meals Step-By-Step

To take care of yourself and others with food, it is important to have regular, reliable meals. To have meals and keep having them, day after day, you need to get enough to eat of food you enjoy. To have meals, start where you are. Take it step-by-step, and move along at your own pace.



1

Re-Think Mealtime. Don't have meals? Don't want them? Keep in mind we aren't talking about cooking from scratch, preparing only "fresh" food, or eating food you are "supposed" to eat but don't enjoy. We are talking about *structure*. A meal is when you sit down to eat, either by yourself or when you share food with others. Period.

2

Get the meal habit. Start by having the same foods you eat now, just have them at regular meal and snack times. Make meals you enjoy with foods that fill you up. Include "forbidden food" at meals or snacks. Eating as much as you want of food you enjoy will let you to feel satisfied enough to forget about food until the next meal or snack time. Help everybody wait for meals by having sit-down snacks between times.

3

Do a little planning. Start by knowing in the morning what you might have for lunch or dinner. Then try figuring out meals a day or two ahead of time. When you introduce a new food, also include a food that you and others know and enjoy at that meal. Eat—or not. Even if you choose food and cook it, you might not want to eat it—this time.

4

Add on, don't take away. Once you have the meal habit you may tire of your usual food. Add on foods one at a time. Consider canned peaches with the pizza or carrot sticks with the chicken nuggets. Calm down family members who get upset by new food: Point out that their favorites are still there, and they don't have to eat anything they don't want to. Maintain the Satter Division of Responsibility in Feeding: You decide *what, when* and *where* to feed, they decide how *much* and *whether* to eat.

5

Keep it enjoyable. Getting the meal habit can get you caught in good-food bad-food thinking. Don't do it! Such thinking gets in the way of having meals and can make meals a chore or a bore. To keep up the work and routine of having meals, you need to enjoy planning, cooking, and eating them!

Make wise use of "forbidden" food. Include chips or fries at mealtime as often as you want them, and eat as much as you want. To keep desserts from being the only thing children eat, offer one serving of dessert and let children eat it before, during, or after the meal. Include sweets regularly at sit-down snacks, and let your child eat as much as they want. Do the same yourself.

Use snacks to support mealtime. Children and adults need to arrive at meals hungry and ready to eat, but not so hungry they can't wait. Have snacks at set times about halfway between meals. Let family members have water (not foods or sweetened drinks) between meals and snacks.