

Ways to Help Children Improve Eating Habits

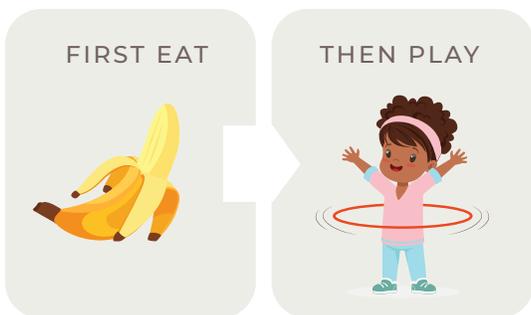
There are many ways to encourage children to try healthy foods and improve their eating habits.

VISUAL TOOLS

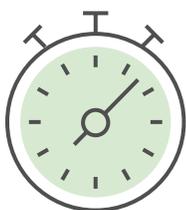


Daily Schedules help children get into a routine of eating at regular snack and mealtimes. Use words and images to show the main activities for the day so children know what to expect before and after they eat.

Or try putting a different image for each snack or mealtime around the face of a clock. Post the schedule where the child can easily see it.



“First-Then” Boards help children who are beginning to use language or have difficulty following verbal directions. A board shows a picture of an object or action followed by a picture of what happens next. For example, a caregiver might show two images while explaining: “First we eat, then we play.”

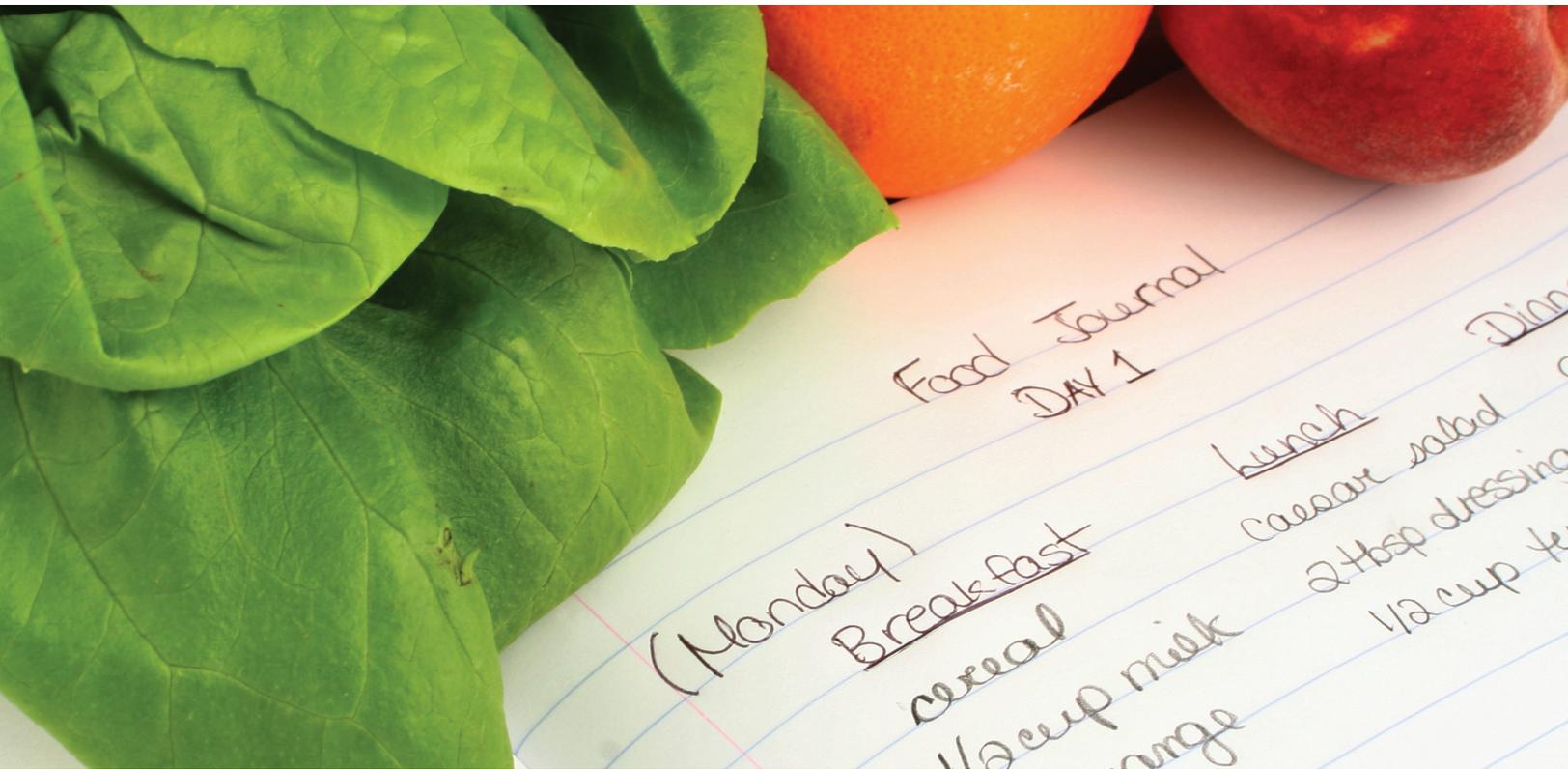


Meal Pacing

Timers, vibrating watches, and pictures can improve meal pacing for children who eat too quickly or too slowly. A timer or vibrating watch can be set to mark the appropriate time to pause between bites. A visual aid, such as a sequence of pictures or photos, can demonstrate activities to extend mealtimes and make them more enjoyable.

Hunger Scales help children understand their level of hunger and feeling full.





OTHER TOOLS

Food Chaining

Food chaining is an individualized, structured approach to increasing the number and types of food a child will eat. A child is gradually exposed to new foods by building on the foods they already enjoy. For example by preparing breaded zucchini “fries” that look and feel like regular french fries.

Food Diaries

Use a food diary for several days to track what a child is eating and drinking and factors such as lighting, noise, smells and the presence of screens (phones, TV etc.) that can impact eating habits. Food diaries can help educators, families, caregivers, and health care providers understand how to improve a child’s nutrition and behavior during meals.



Social Stories

A [social story](#) uses simple story telling to describe how to handle a situation or concept that a child finds challenging. Each social story is created for an individual child for a specific situation. For example a story could describe appropriate behavior before or during mealtimes or how to talk to peers at lunchtime. The story uses pictures, photographs and words to include people or objects a child values.

Token Systems

Caregivers and families can create a simple system that allows a child to earn a token or reward for trying a new fruit or vegetable or improving a specific behavior such as sitting quietly at the table. Tokens should be non-food items, such as stickers, marbles, or cards that an adult can give to a child immediately after they complete the requested activity. Tokens or cards can later be traded for larger rewards like extra outdoor play time or visiting a friend.