

Family Mealtime Discipline

- Have a formal agreement between both parents and all caretakers for your child that the following rules will be followed and understood. If there's any inconsistency between people the child will undoubtedly take advantage of it.
- Meal times, especially dinner, should be a time of family get-together. Engage your child in meaningful conversation as you do anyone else at dinnertime. Strive to make family mealtimes a pleasant, bonding experience. Do not yell at or plead with your child to eat. Be matter-of-fact about the whole process.
- Insist on a twenty minute time minimum at the table. Young kids would rather play than eat. Often they'll skip the scheduled mealtime entirely in order to play while attempting to eat on the run. If they sit at the table, but refuse to eat, insist that they remain seated at the table until the twenty minutes are up. Set a timer to go off, if necessary, to squelch the pleadings of, "Can I get up yet?"
- Serve children the same meal items that you'll be cooking for everyone else. Try to include one menu item that your child will usually eat, and avoid generally disliked foods such as liver or broccoli. Do not tailor the meal planning entirely around the child's wishes.
- The rules are simple. If your child eats at least a fair portion of the meal, the child is then entitled to a between-meal snack. If the child does not eat at least a fair portion of the meal within twenty minutes, the child then gets nothing but water until the next regularly scheduled family mealtime at breakfast, lunch, or dinner.
- Many parents, but especially grandparents, worry needlessly that the children in their family are too skinny. This usually reflects the frustration of getting a child to eat well. Parents become concerned that the child is unhealthy because he or she won't eat well. In many European and Asian cultures having a skinny child reflected, unfairly, on the parents as not being able to provide enough food for the child to eat. Actually, being slightly on the lean side is healthier than being overweight. It's perfectly okay for you to be able to see the ribs in a pre-school age child who is otherwise healthy and growing normally. Pediatricians track the child's growth from birth on onto growth charts which can tell us that all is going well.
- Unless you purposely try to raise your child as a strict vegetarian, which is against our medical advice, there should be no reason for your child to take supplemental vitamins unless these are recommended for other reasons of chronic illness like lead poisoning, etc.
- If you insist on the need for vitamins to be given to your child (usually to get the grandparents off your back), we recommend a chewable multivitamin with extra vitamin C, such as Bugs Bunny with Extra C or Flintstones with Extra C. Of course, store brand equivalents of these are fine, too. Just avoid those vitamins with extra iron because these can cause a real poisoning problem if the child were to get into all of them at once. Also, avoid health food store brands or supplements that are too expensive and may border on quackery.

GOOD LUCK!