

Eating Skills Tip Sheet

MDE-LIO ILSP

Beginning/Intermediate Tips

- Be consistent. Try to eat the same number of meals at the same time every day.
- Be consistent with the table setting each time, allowing the child to locate common items easily
- Be consistent with the words used for foods, dinnerware, utensils, and actions and let others know which words to use so consistency remains in as many environments as possible
- Eat at the same place for all your meals, (or almost all), preferably the table, which provides the best environment to work on eating skills
- Provide the child with a stable chair and make sure he or she is in a comfortable, secure position
- Make sure the child shows good posture, with legs, hips and feet bent, leaning forward slightly to hold his or her mouth over the plate
- If his or her feet do not reach the floor, place a box or stool underfoot for support
- Start with hand-over-hand instruction, then phase-out to less and less direct contact
- Be ready for messes, placing a drop-cloth or newspapers under the child's chair and wear an apron, providing the child with a bib if age-appropriate
- As spills or breaks occur, remain calm as much as possible; showing agitation will only increase the child's nervousness, causing more difficulty and less enjoyment during the learning process
- Use unbreakable dishes, at least during the learning period
- Choose plates with sides to help prevent food from slipping off during the learning period
- Place plates and dishes on non-slippery surfaces or choose dishes with suction cups attached to help stabilize and prevent messes and frustration
- If a child has some sight, use highly contrasting dinnerware and place-settings or a contrasting tablecloth/placemat
- Eat your meals together, as a family
- Avoid interruptions, turning the television down or off, asking people not to call or turning off phones, and providing a calm, nurturing environment
- Keep the noise level down to normal conversation
- Give your child enough time to eat, but give a general time-limit and maintain consistency with it, ending the meal when time is up by clearing dishes from the table
- Prepare meals that are balanced in variety and texture, as well as nutritionally sound
- Give small portions, it's easier for a child to ask for more than to face the frustration of having too much and never finishing

- If your child doesn't seem hungry at meal-times, cut out snacking, space meals farther apart and encourage exercise
- Let your child touch food, but not play with it, with you providing descriptions of texture and taste as he or she explores
- If your child is tactilely defensive to certain foods, try adding them to other, more popular foods in small amounts (such as small amounts of crunchy cereal to smooth applesauce)
- Try not to force an experience with a new texture or taste, but don't take one bad reaction as the end of a certain food
- Talk about a new food before introducing it, comparing it to other familiar foods by taste, texture, and if the child has sight, color as well

Intermediate/Advanced Tips

- Let your child use the same dinnerware as everyone else in the family as soon as he or she is ready, including napkins
- Let your child use a piece of bread or a roll as a "pusher" to move foods onto the fork or spoon
- Introduce knives and forks when ready
- Let your child try to use a continental style of holding knife and fork, holding the knife in the dominant hand and the fork tongs-down, using the knife as a cutter and pusher at the same time
- Use consistent positional terms to describe where food is on the plate and dinnerware is on the table
- Start with using the terms top, bottom, left and right, then switch to clock-face terminology to describe the location of food on a plate, (12 o'clock at the top of the plate, 6 o'clock at the bottom)
- Teach your child to eat difficult foods first, so they may be pushed against other foods to more easily get them onto the utensil (pushing corn against steak)

These tips are primarily from a Hadley School for the Blind ADL course, as well as various parent tips and other websites.

Other resources include:

Mangold, Phillip N. **Pleasure of Eating for Those who are Visually Impaired, Revised**. Castro Valley, CA: Exceptional Teaching Aids, 1993.

Techniques and Adaptations for Teaching Eating Skills with the Blind

J. Crawford. (1993). Kansas State School for the Blind, Kansas City. 38 pp.

Tips for Eating Neatly in Restaurants and Other People's Homes

- 1). When dining out at another person's home try to find out ahead of time what is being served. This information will help you in two ways:
 - a) you will not have to ask someone at the table about what is being served.
 - b). if something is being served that will be very difficult for you to manage (such as lobster) you may wish to ask the hostess to prepare your portion for you in the kitchen before serving it.
- 2) When dining in a restaurant, order foods which are prepared in a manner familiar to you.
- 3) Ask for foods with loose pieces (corn) to be served on the side in a separate bowl.
- 4) When you sit down at the table, discretely move your hands lightly around your place setting. Locate your flatware and its placement. The arrangement of the flatware will indicate something of the order and type of courses to be served. Move your hands lightly around the plate to get an idea of its size. Locate such items as the bread plate, salad plate, bowls, glasses etc. It is easier and safer to locate these items before food is served. Be cautious however because some foods such as condiments may have already been placed on the table.
- 5) When you have been served, use your fork as a delicate probe to determine the location, shape, and kind of food on the plate.
- 6) When served a plate of food with loose pieces (such as peas), eat those foods first using the more stationary foods on your plate as a buffer to push the loose food against. For example, position your plate so you can push your peas towards your mashed potatoes as you load your fork.
- 7) If you have a large piece of meat such as a steak on your plate and your plate is crowded, eat some of the food around the steak before you attempt to cut it. That way if the steak shifts as you cut it, it will be less likely to push food off of the plate.
- 8) Meat is easier to cut up if the plate is rotated so that the meat is closest to you (in the 6 o'clock position).
- 9) When cutting meat, lightly probe the piece of meat first with your fork and knife to get an idea of its size and shape. Use your fork to locate the edge of the meat closest to you and then move the fork up and in just a bit. Place the knife blade against the back of the fork before beginning to cut. Cut around

the fork using the fork as a guide to keep the size of the piece of meat around an inch in size

- 10) Remember that it is not necessary to eat every bite of food on your plate. The last pieces of food may be difficult to locate and are better off left uneaten.
- 11) When reaching for your glass or cup, keep your hand low and move your fingers lightly across the top of the table. This way, you will make contact with unexpected objects at their base and will be less likely to knock them over.
- 12) During the meal, be aware of any changes being made in the placement of glasses, cups, serving dishes etc. as food and drinks are being replenished.
- 13) Avoid wearing loose fitting clothes and clothes with long puffy sleeves which might accidentally come in contact with food on your plate or become entangled with objects on the table.
- 14) Wearing solid color clothing will enable you to see spills easier if they occur.
- 15) To season food with salt and pepper, shake it into your hand first and then sprinkle it over your food.
- 16) Periodically during the meal, discretely check around your plate to determine if any large pieces of food have fallen off of your plate and replace them on your plate.
- 17) Good posture is important when eating. Try not to slouch. When leaning forward to get your mouth over the plate, lean at your hips keeping your back straight.
- 18) When buttering bread, stick only the tip of your knife into the butter to prevent getting a large chunk of butter on your knife.

Taken from Mangold, Phillip (1980) *The Pleasure of Eating for Those Who are Visually Impaired*, Castro Valley, CA: E.T.A.