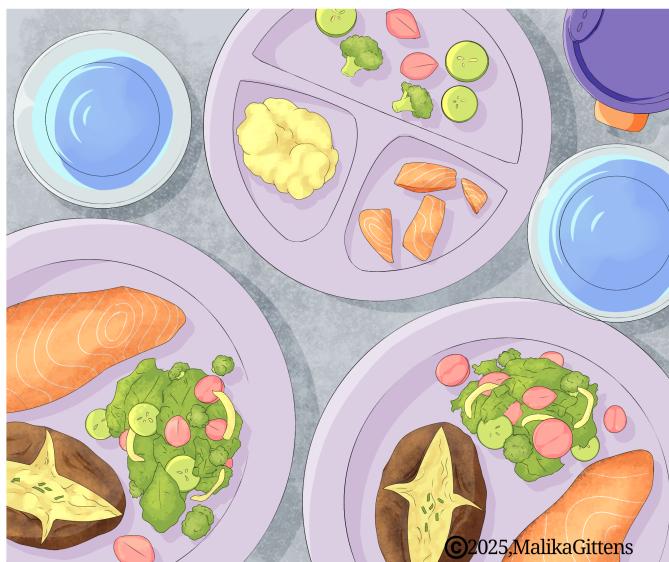


# Promoting Healthy Habits

Habits are developed whether we intend for them to be or not, and bad habits are formed just as easily as good ones, if not more so. Starting early, as soon as your child is born, can allow your child to develop healthy habits. These in turn increase the likelihood that your child will continue these good practices into adulthood and go on to live a healthy life.

## Diet



Mealtimes for children are more than just nourishment for the body. They can be an important time for the development of social skills and other types of development. Your child health nurse or paediatrician can advise you on how much and when to integrate solid food into your baby's diet. Breastfeeding exclusively up to age 6 months is recommended, but it is understood that this is not always possible for many reasons. Wherever possible, try to ensure that baby benefits from breast milk for at least six months. Breast-fed babies are

less likely to be overweight or develop childhood obesity, and obesity in childhood is associated with physical and mental health problems. Bonding also occurs during breastfeeding, and is therefore important for mother and baby. When solid foods are introduced, avoid salty and sugary snacks, highly processed foods and sugar-sweetened beverages. Even 100% fruit juice can be too high in calories. Instead, water should be used, and fruits eaten. Low-fat milk is also a healthy option for a drink.

Bonding with and sharing mealtime time with your baby can occur even when breastfeeding ends, and it is important to ensure that healthy routines and habits related to food are instilled early. When introducing new foods, patience is required, especially if your child is a picky eater. Offering a child small portions of two healthy snacks and allowing them to choose can increase the likelihood that they will make healthy choices on their own later on. Healthy snacks also help little ones to remain fuller

between meals and reduces tantrums related to hunger. Portion control and over-eating should also be avoided.

Children learn by example, and parents who eat a healthy diet tend to pass these healthy habits on to their children. Eating as a family can also allow children to develop appropriate social skills important for adulthood. It supports conversation skills and vocabulary development, demonstrates the necessary food groups and appropriate portion sizes for each food group (so parents have to know and adhere to this as well), it improves fine motor skills as children learn to use their fingers and then utensils for eating. As they get older, giving children the opportunity to help prepare a meal, set the table and clean up after a meal gives them a sense of responsibility and belonging, and promotes essential skills for living as a part of a group.

