

# CREATING MEALTIMES WITH TUBE FED CHILDREN

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*feeding matters*

*Conquering pediatric feeding struggles  
to nourish healthy futures*

## what is a mealtime?

Mealtimes are unique experiences that involve more than sitting around a table and eating food. Take a moment to think about a recent mealtime and about how you participated, what was involved, and what was shared at that meal. Rarely are mealtimes defined by the mechanics of eating but rather, they often involve communication, socialization, discovery, and celebration. Feeding is simply the more physical aspect of providing the body food.

## why are mealtimes important for tube fed children?

How food enters the body is entirely unimportant when thinking about mealtimes. Instead of focusing on the medical side of tube feedings, think about how you can form the foundation for all future meals. If tube fed mealtimes are uncomfortable then the desire to eat can be negatively affected. A child's inner guided desire to eat can only be enhanced if they experience a very positive relationship with food.

## what does an enjoyable mealtime look like?

Communication during tube fed meals is significant. It is important to continue or introduce the language often heard during typical mealtimes. Think about what message the body is sending to the child at that particular time.

Questions may include:

- Are you hungry?
- Are you thirsty?
- Is your tummy full?
- Do you need a break?
- Do you have a happy tummy?

Learn to share and enjoy meals with others is another route to more enjoyable mealtimes. The more opportunities to let the child explore and discover the world of food -- the better! It is the job of the parent to provide as many opportunities as possible for the child.

Activities can include:

- Washing hands and face after meals
- Gardening
- Food preparation
- Cooking
- Setting and clearing the table
- Grocery shopping