

Relaxed mealtimes

Feeding children and nurturing healthy eating is a shared job. Parents, schools and students each have a defined role in eating:

Parents decide what food is provided from home. If food is provided by the school, such as in the canteen, they choose what is offered on these occasions.

Schools decide when and where students eat.

Students decide how much, in what order and whether they eat.

This means that as a school you can take the focus off the *'what'* and *'how much'* students eat and focus on making mealtimes enjoyable. Creating a positive, relaxed and social mealtime can help children to build healthy eating behaviours. You can do this by:

- Developing a mealtime routine
- Allowing enough time to eat
- Having a comfortable place to eat

Developing a mealtime routine

- Having a regular routine helps students know what is expected of them at mealtimes. This can help students feel relaxed and calm about eating.
- Being relaxed at mealtimes can help build students comfort around food and over time help them learn to enjoy a variety of foods.
- Playing some relaxing music, doing some mindful breathing or sharing a phrase of gratitude or prayer that signals the start of a mealtime can be helpful.
- All teachers will do this differently, but an example of a mealtime routine might be:
 - Students put away any screens, schoolwork or toys to reduce distractions
 - Students wash their hands
 - Students collect their food and take a seat, where they will stay until the end of the mealtime
 - A phrase of gratitude is shared or another ritual that signals the start of the mealtime
 - At the end of the meal, students put rubbish into the bin before play time or returning to class.

Move Well Eat Well

Allowing enough time to eat

- Having enough time to eat gives students the best chance of feeling relaxed and calm about eating.
- If meals are rushed, children are more likely to feel anxious which can decrease their appetite.
- If students know that they have time to eat, it allows them to really listen to their internal body cues. This will help them to reach a happy point of feeling satisfied, but not overly full.
- In Tasmania, schools choose how to timetable their meals. Allowing enough time (ideally 15 to 20 minutes) to eat and sit quietly will help children to relax and eat at a comfortable pace.
- If your school finds that children are often rushing their lunch to go and play, you might like to trial structuring lunchtime differently. Some schools have had success with a play first, eat second lunchtimes



Having a comfortable place to eat

- When children are seated comfortably and have a pleasant place to eat, they can concentrate on the mealtime and listen to their internal hunger and fullness cues without distraction. For more information see our Internal Hunger and Fullness resource at: www.movewelleatwell.tas.gov.au/primary_schools/plant_fruit_and_veg_in_your_lunchbox/nurturing_healthy_mealtimes_in_primary_schools
- Try looking at your school's eating environment through new eyes. Is there anything that could be improved? Consider:
 - Is there a comfortable spot to sit?
 - Is the environment kept clean? Are there rubbish bins around to help with this?
 - Is it a comfortable temperature and protected from the elements?
 - Is it quiet and calm? For example, is the spot away from the noise of busy roads (if possible)?
 - Does the eating environment encourage social interaction? For example, are children encouraged to sit in a smaller group, rather than spreading out over a large playground? If they eat in the classroom, could they be seated at a communal table?
- What it means to create 'a comfortable eating environment' will be different for every school. If you are reviewing your school food environment, consider getting older children involved. They will bring a valuable perspective.