

# Managing Meal Time Battles

with your child this COVID-19 pandemic



'Picky eating' is something most parents are familiar with. Feeding difficulties, including picky eating, can be especially challenging to manage and a source of stress for many families during this pandemic.

As school has stopped for most, parents are now responsible for all the meals. Here are some strategies by **Dr Tammy Lim**, Associate Consultant at Child Development Unit, National University Hospital to help manage meal time battles.

## View this circuit breaker as an opportunity for family meals

For most working parents, having family meals on weekdays is rare.

This is an unprecedented opportunity, so try to enjoy these moments.



## Be kind to yourself

Feeding your child nuggets does not make you a bad parent.

Allow yourself and your child to have some 'off' days. We can get back on track the next day.

## Plan ahead

It will make grocery shopping more efficient. Involve children by getting them to draw out the menu and display it on the refrigerator.

Think of meals that can be frozen to save time on busy days.

## Maintaining routines

Keep to the same daily timings for meals and use visual schedules for young children.

Avoid giving children snacks throughout the day as this would result in poor appetite during meal times.



## Limit the meal duration to 30 – 45 minutes

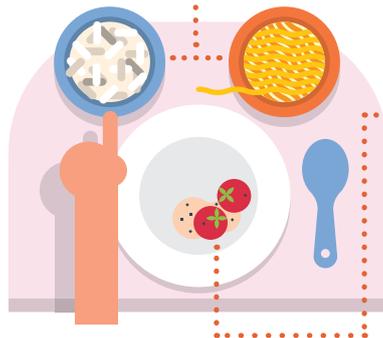
Beyond that, children are unlikely to consume significantly more calories.

A prolonged duration of coaxing is also stressful for the parent. Try setting a timer to cue that meal time is over.

## Incorporate fun

Grocery packing and food preparation can allow children to experience food positively without any pressure of eating.

Parents can make meal times more interesting by describing food, asking children about the food properties or presenting foods in various shapes and colours.



## Offer choices

Choices allow children to regain a sense of control, for example, choosing rice or noodles.

## Preferred and less preferred foods

Offer children at least one preferred food every meal so they can be full.

New foods can also be offered. Be patient, as they may require up to 15 introductions of a new food before accepting it.

## Managing distractions at meal times

Delay the introduction of screens and toys as much as possible. A hungry child is more likely to sit still during meal times.

Encourage children to feed themselves and chat with them during the meal.



## Seek help

Parents who are concerned about their child's nutrition should seek professional help.



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