

Let's Eat! Enhancing Mealtime Participation for Children with Down Syndrome

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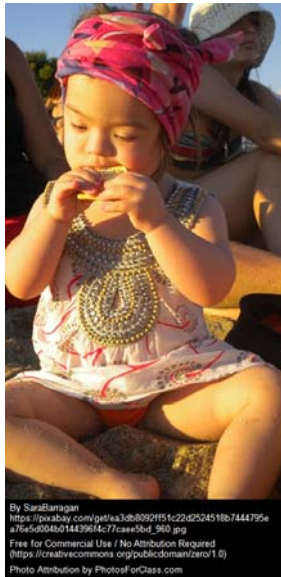
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Food is fuel, but so much more!



taken from www.pexels.com

Mealtimes are significant life moments



“The shared meal elevates eating from a mechanical process of fueling the body to a ritual of family and community, from the mere animal biology to an act of culture”

Michael Pollan

Food is deeply
symbolic and
connected to
memories and
emotions.

“A party
without cake
is just a
meeting”

-Julia Childs



Taken from
www.Pexels.com

What does participation mean?

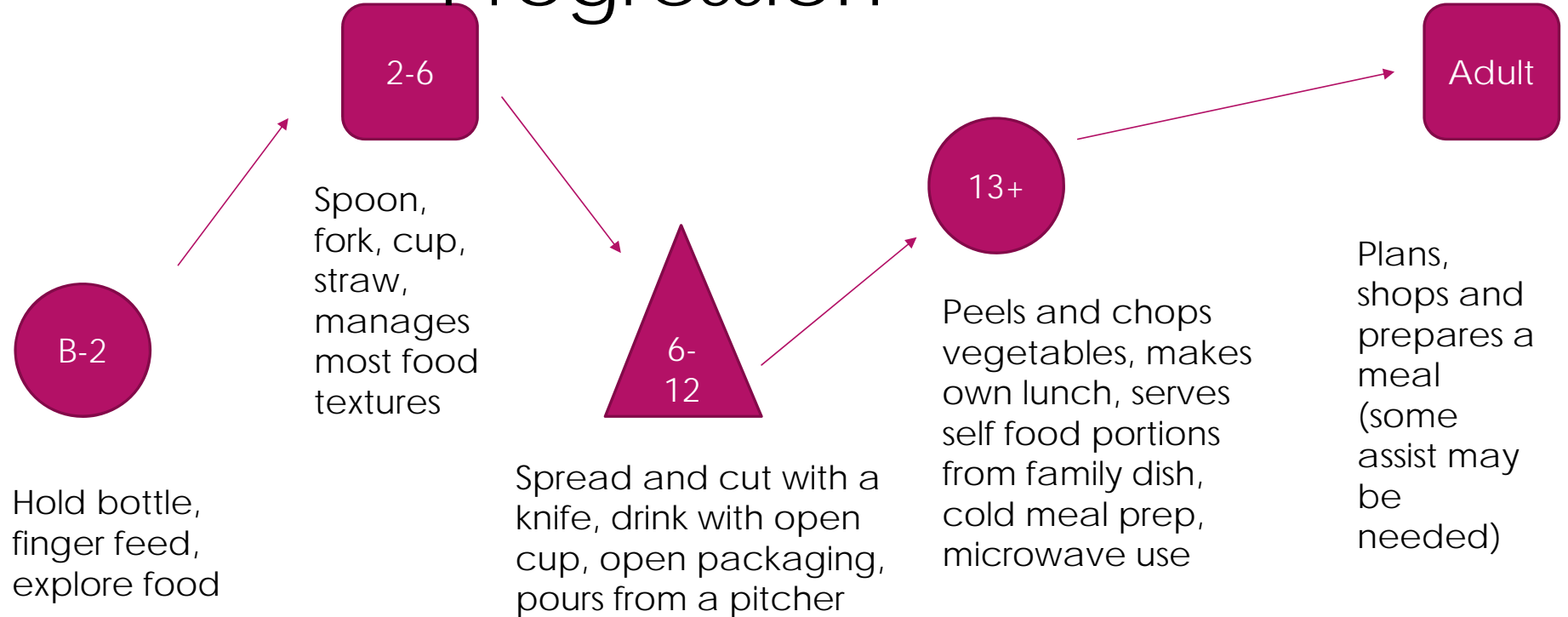


Taken from www.pexels.com

Taking part in something
(feeding/mealtimes)

- ▶ Oral intake
- ▶ Self feeding
- ▶ Joining the family at the table or other regular mealtime contexts
- ▶ Being a part of outings and celebrations involving food
- ▶ Planning, shopping and prepping for meals

Self Feeding Progression



What is the mealtime social participation progression?

- ▶ Infants –enjoy being fed, open mouth in anticipation, play with food
- ▶ Toddlers/preschool –join others at the table, interact during meal, express choice, imitate others
- ▶ School age – anticipate routines, help set table, help prep food, help shop, follow social rules at the table, interact socially
- ▶ Teens/Young adults
 - ▶ Manage clean up
 - ▶ Set table
 - ▶ Plan meals/shop with assist
 - ▶ Entertain others with food involved
 - ▶ Learn about nutrition
 - ▶ Order at a fast food or sit down restaurant



What are some barriers? Person Level

- ▶ Low tone/strength in mouth, lips, tongue
- ▶ Anatomical differences – small oral cavity, larger thicker tongue
- ▶ Poor coordination of mouth/tongue muscles
- ▶ Swallowing difficulties
- ▶ Slow development of fine motor skills
- ▶ Medical/health challenges
- ▶ Stressful history of poor eating
- ▶ Sensory sensitivities to texture, flavor, temperature
- ▶ Under-responsive to sensory input
- ▶ Poor postural stability



A word about Dysphagia (Swallowing Difficulties)

- ▶ A common and persistent problem in children with DS
- ▶ At risk for aspiration – often silent
- ▶ Can only diagnose via a swallow study

Management Strategies

- ▶ Thickening liquids
- ▶ Avoiding unsafe foods
- ▶ Proper positioning during feeding (chin tuck)
- ▶ May require tube feeding for a time

More Challenges - Environment

- ▶ Parents lack strategies to manage behaviors
- ▶ Distracting/overwhelming environments – school cafeteria!
- ▶ Family habits don't support good mealtimes
- ▶ Lack of opportunity to learn new skills or try new foods



Taken from www.steadystrength.com

Set the Stage for Success

- ▶ Have regular family mealtimes!
- ▶ Limit technology while eating
- ▶ Model good food choices and enjoyment of food
- ▶ Involve child in mealtime rituals – hand washing, set table, placemats, clear table
- ▶ Provide choice
- ▶ Good supportive seating
- ▶ Repeated exposure to new foods
- ▶ Avoid power struggles



Taken from www.pexels.com

Match skill with challenge



1. Food choice – what can they handle safely?
2. Self feeding – what dishes and utensils support success?
3. Look for ways to participate despite limitations
4. Keep providing opportunities for new skill learning



Some ideas to support self feeding

Finger feeding

- ▶ Give them a cracker to hold and chew on
- ▶ Throw puffs or soft bits of food on the tray
- ▶ Hold a small piece in your hand for them to try to grasp with a pinch

Spoon use

- ▶ Use a short, fat spoon for easy grasping
- ▶ Shallow bowl of spoon is easier to clear
- ▶ Angled utensils help get it in mouth
- ▶ Use spoon with thick sticky food for success
- ▶ Scooper plate or bowl



More ideas

Fork use

- ▶ Short fat fork
- ▶ Preload tines and have them bring to mouth
- ▶ Use first with easy to spear food such as pancakes, scrambled egg, etc

Drinking

- ▶ Cup with handles , flow control
- ▶ Use thicker liquids
- ▶ Cup with rim
- ▶ Rest open cup on lip, not teeth
- ▶ Use straw trainer (Honey bear straw trainer)



Addressing specific barriers – get help!

- ▶ Feeding therapy and support from OT, speech-language pathologist, behavioral psychologist, dietitian, medical help (GI)
- ▶ Ask about their experience and training in this area
- ▶ Child intervention AND parent coaching is optimal
- ▶ Get daycare/school on board as well



Helpful Resources

- ▶ Bruni, M. (1998). *Fine motor skills in children with Down syndrome: A guide for parents and professionals*. Woodbine House.
- ▶ Klein, M. D., & Morris, S. E. (1999). *Mealtime participation guide*. PsychCorp.
- ▶ Satter, E. (2000). *Child of mine: Feeding with love and good sense*. Bull Publishing Company.
- ▶ Evans Morris, S., & Dunn Klein, M. (2000). Pre-feeding skills: a comprehensive resource for mealtime development. *Therapy Skill Builders*.



Questions??