



Because no family should stand alone

Eating & Mealtimes – Tips and Support for Autistic Children

Selective Eating / Limited Food Range

- Keep 'safe foods' available – they help children feel secure.
- Introduce new foods slowly, starting with having them on the table nearby.
- Focus on exploration rather than eating (smell, touch, small lick).
- Let your child help prepare food for no-pressure familiarity.

Textures, Smells & Colours of Food

- Present very small portions to avoid overwhelm.
- Offer new foods in separate dishes if mixing textures causes stress.
- Change only one thing at a time (texture, shape, temperature, colour).
- Use familiar cups, bowls, and plates to provide predictability.

Sitting at the Table

- Start with very short mealtime durations and build up gradually.
- Allow movement breaks during meals if needed.
- Use a favourite seat, cushion, or footrest for comfort and grounding.
- Keep the environment calm with low noise and low visual distractions.

Routine & Predictability

- Eat meals around the same time each day to reduce anxiety.
- Use a visual mealtime schedule so the child knows what to expect.
- Prepare your child verbally before changing any mealtime routine.
- Keep portions small to avoid visual overwhelm.

Reducing Mealtime Stress

- Avoid pressure, bribing, or forcing – this can increase anxiety.
- Model calm eating and curiosity rather than instructions.

- Celebrate tiny steps such as smelling or touching a new food.
- End mealtimes positively, even if little was eaten.

Mealtimes are not just about food – they are about safety, comfort, and connection. Progress can be slow and gentle. Every small step forward is real progress, and you are doing amazing.