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**Subject:** Mealtime

**Source:** Early Head Start Minimum Standards

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## **Policy**

Mealtimes are designed to promote the physical, social, and emotional development of children and to increase knowledge about healthy eating.

## **Procedure**

1. The mealtime environment will be adapted to meet all children's varying developmental needs and different cultural backgrounds.
2. Every child will receive a quantity of food in meals and snacks, which provides at least two-thirds of their daily nutritional needs, with consideration for meeting any special needs of children.
3. All children who have not received breakfast at the time they arrive will be served a nourishing breakfast, if they arrive at the Early Head Start center by 8:30 a.m. If a child is late arriving to the center a snack or breakfast will be given to the child according to the USDA guidelines.
4. In order to ensure good appetites and a relaxing mealtime environment, calming transitional activities will be planned before meals.
5. Breakfast will be served at least three before lunch, and afternoon snacks will be served at least three hours after lunch.
6. In order to have a successful nutritional environment, mealtimes will occur in a quiet, well-lit and ventilated area.
7. The table, chairs, and eating utensils will be age appropriate.
8. Food will be cut into shapes and sizes that are easy for young children to manage and which will reduce the risk of choking.
9. *Food will not be used as punishment or reward*, and children are encouraged, but not forced or coerced to eat or taste.
10. The size and number of servings will reflect consideration of each child's needs. Teachers will have children start with the minimum USDA required portions and allow for additional portions as desired.
11. Sufficient time is allowed for each child to eat – usually around ½ hour.
12. Family-style service will be utilized in the classroom, unless it is determined that it is unsanitary to proceed with this style of food service.
13. Any children that exhibit signs of illness (i.e. runny nose, cough) should not serve themselves, but should have the adult at the table, which is not exhibiting signs of illness, serve them.
14. Meal-related activities (setting tables, rinsing plates, preparing food) will provide opportunities for decision-making, responsibility, sharing, communication and fine motor eye-hand coordination.
15. Minimum Required quantities of food are to be placed in serving bowls while the bulk of the food is kept heated to 145 degrees. This prevents waste and possible food-borne illness. All food put on the table must be discarded.
16. A variety of foods will be served to broaden each child's food experience