

The Grandparent Guide: Making the Most of Mealtimes



ZERO TO THREE
Early connections last a lifetime

by Sarah MacLaughlin and Kathy Kinsner

Grandparents play a major role in raising the next generation. **While parents work, grandparents step in to help care for 24% of kids under 5 years old.**

Figuring out how to make sure kids are eating the right things, in the right amounts, can be tough for new parents. As a grandparent, you've been there, but it's natural to still have questions. Here's our guide to most common dilemmas that come up around young children, feeding, and mealtimes.



**You might
be wondering...**



**"Should he be eating
solid foods by now?"**

**Here's the
rest of the story**

Today, pediatricians advise only breastmilk and/or formula for the first 6 months.

How can you tell babies are ready for solid food? Experts say it's when they can fully hold up their own heads, sit up by themselves, and seem interested in trying what you're eating. Your grandchild's health care provider will advise on what foods to start with and when to begin.

You might
be wondering...



"I'm worried that she's
not eating enough."

Does your grandchild have the energy to explore, move, play, and learn? Chances are, she is probably getting enough nutrition. Talk to your son or daughter about whether they'd like you to track what your grandchild eats while in your care. If they have concerns, health care providers are happy to answer their questions.



"She's a picky eater."

This is another common worry among parents and grandparents. But many children take a long time to adjust to new foods. Check in with your grandchild's parents about what foods they'd like their child to try. Then offer new foods—along with foods your grandchild does like—at each meal. Research shows that **children need to be offered a new food 10–15 times before they will eat it.** (Hint: they're more likely to try foods they see you eating and enjoying!)



"What happened to
'cleaning your plate?'"

You may have childhood memories of having to sit at the table until you'd finished everything on your plate. But new research says "cleaning your plate" teaches kids to ignore their body's cues of fullness, which can lead to unhealthy eating behaviors later on. Pediatricians encourage today's parents to practice "responsive feeding," which means it's the adult's job to provide age-appropriate servings of healthy meals and snacks. It's the child's job to decide what and how much to eat. In other words, the grown-up provides, the child decides.

If you're worried about wastefulness, start small. Keep in mind that toddlers' stomachs are about as big as their fists—so they tend to eat a lot less than adults.

**You might
be wondering...**



**“Grandma loves you.
Have a cookie!”**

**Here’s the
rest of the story**

Grandparents are famous for bending the rules—including providing treats when parents might say “no.” Here are a couple things to keep in mind:

- It’s a good idea to avoid using food as a reward or punishment.
- Substitute hugs, stories, playing together or other “treats” instead of snacks.
- Talk to your son or daughter about their views on sweets and try to keep your practices consistent. This is an important part of “sharing the care” of

Mealtimes are a great time to connect with your grandkids and support their overall development. Turn off the TV, silence the cell phones, and make mealtimes screen-free for everyone. Sit together and take time to enjoy each other’s company—even before your grandchild is old enough to talk. These simple mealtime routines build strong family relationships and a healthy relationship with food. ZERO TO THREE has lots more [resources on health and nutrition](#) to read and share. And be sure to check out our other [materials](#) created especially for grandparents.



Check out more resources for grandparents at zerotothree.org/grandparents.