

# Parenting and Feeding

## With Complex Chronic Diseases



Being responsible for family meals can be daunting! The pressures some cooks face to satisfy competing food preferences, might complicate family meals to the point where you are unable to cope. Whether your children are toddlers or teens, all kids require structure with eating and benefit from having parents who follow the **“division of responsibility (sDOR) in feeding”**.

Created by Ellyn Satter (dietitian, family therapist) the Division of Responsibility feeding model is the gold-standard for feeding children. The core principles are simple in theory:

- **Parents are responsible for the “what, when, and where”**. More specifically, you choose and prepare the food (with assistance if needed/available), you provide the structure by setting a predictable time for meals/snacks, and you decide where your sit-down meal will happen (eg. at a table, or picnic style at the park).
- **Your child is responsible for “how much and whether”**. More specifically, they get to choose what foods they will eat from the foods you have offered, and the quantity they need to feel satisfied and grow properly (occasionally they may choose not to eat anything at all).

In reality the sDOR is easier said, than done! The two most important lessons to learn from sDOR when feeding a family in the context of complex chronic diseases, are:

1) You are not responsible for getting your child to eat. Plan and prepare one meal per night, and that’s it! The cook’s job is done when the meal goes on the table. After that, it is up to the eaters to do their job.

2) Even if you worry that your food isn’t very “healthy”, keep in mind that the least healthy meal is much better than no meal at all. Structured and sit-down meals/snacks are the backbone of sDOR. Get in the habit of family meals by eating what you already normally eat, but at predictable times. Once you have the “when” of sDOR mastered, then you can focus on the “what” by adding items to improve the nutritional profile of the meal.



# Practical things I can do

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1

**Prepare a schedule for planned, sit-down meals and snacks.** It is ideal for those with CCD to have something to eat every 3-5 hours. Families with young children usually need to provide 3 meals and 2 snacks per day (the adults may or may not need that many feeding opportunities). Use this resource to get started with family meals: <https://www.ellynsatterinstitute.org/family-meals-focus/5-family-meals-getting-meal-habit/>

2

**Close the kitchen between meals and snacks.** This will help prevent children from getting into the habit of grazing throughout the day. Children who graze can have trouble regulating their food and may eat too little or too much food. Children who graze do poorly with food acceptance and are less likely to come to family meals hungry. Offer water between meals and snacks.

3

**Eat family meals together, at a table, without distractions.** Whatever food you are eating, whether it is a home-cooked or take-out meal, eat together, at a table, without a T.V. or other electronic devices. If you have concerns about the overuse of ultra-processed food, see this resource discussing "Forbidden Foods": <https://www.ellynsatterinstitute.org/family-meals-focus/39-using-forbidden-food/>

4

**Include new foods with familiar foods.** If your child gets upset about new food, remind them that their favourites are still on the table. Let your child know that they don't have to eat the new food if they don't want to. Don't get discouraged! It can take children between 10-20 exposures (sometimes more) to accept a new food.

5

**Stick to the sDOR, even when it gets challenging.** If your children are having challenges adapting to sDOR as a new approach to feeding, here are some phrases you can say to help manage complaints: <https://www.ellynsatterinstitute.org/family-meals-focus/41-moves-and-counter-moves-with-feeding-your-child/>

6

**Recruit little helpers to reduce your workload.** When your child is ready to start demonstrating independence, consider recruiting their help. Whether it's making their own breakfast or packing their lunch, a little help can go a long way. Sally Kuzemchak, "Real Mom Nutrition" blogger, has helpful resources on her website: <https://www.realmomnutrition.com/ultimate-guide-getting-your-kids-to-pack-their-own-lunch/>

7

**Consider having your teen(s) cook one meal a week.** Engaging in meal planning, preparation and cooking will not only develop your child's food skills but give the usual cook some rest. Check out these tips to get your teens in the kitchen: <https://www.unlockfood.ca/en/Articles/Teenagers/-Top-10-easy-ways-to-get-teens-cooking.aspx>