

Meals & Snacks during Online Learning

With virtual learning, your child is eating at home more than ever. Your child may have had different routines for meals and snacks at school, which could impact how you plan for those times during a virtual school day at home. For example, your routines and expectations for a family dinner may be different than for a school day lunch. Below are some ideas for how to make meals and snacks work for your child(ren) and your family.



Make meals and snack a regular part of a daily routine. Meals and snacks can add predictability in virtual learning routines that may vary from day to day. Hopefully there is a schedule that allows for consistent times for snacks and meals, but if not, you can still build a routine by having a regular location or a consistent transition routine (for example turn off computer, wash hands, and eat).

Consider your child's needs. For some children, meals or snacks are a needed and deserved social break from being engaged in online schoolwork for the rest of the day. School is hard and virtual school may take a different level of focus. If your child needs these times to recharge, consider setting up a mealtime or snack time routine that allows for downtime. Not all meals need to be family meals just because you are at home. For other children, meals or snacks might be a time to process or share about their day. They may want or need to talk to someone during these snacks or meals.

Balance healthy eating and independence. Healthy eating is certainly important, but snacks and meals at school are often a time when children can exercise their independence. Provide healthy options, but also offer children an opportunity to make choices, just as they might when they are eating in the cafeteria at school. See the sample snack choice board on the following page.

Think about building in social opportunities. Snacks and meals are often used as a time for building social skills in the school day (like lunch groups). As noted above, these times may also be a welcome break, but consider building in social experiences on occasion. This could be a physically distanced lunch with other children in the neighborhood, a virtual meet-up with a classmate or friend, or a special "kids only" lunch with their siblings.

Always consult your child's doctor if there are concerns about nutrition, growth, or food allergies.

For more information see: <https://www.marcus.org/autism-resources/autism-tips-and-resources/tips-for-structuring-meals>