

Mealtime Magic happens when you feed your child's need for success!

3 and 4 year olds are at a special stage.

- They have a strong need to learn new skills. They love success and praise!
- They are becoming more aware of who they are and that they are a part of the family. Helping shop for food and fix it gives them a role in family life.
- Children may be more likely to eat foods that they have chosen at the store or helped fix.
- Thank children for helping and they will want to help again!



Children this age can unload bags after shopping.



Children learn a lot through play. They love to have fun with food!



They can peel bananas, tear lettuce for salad, and put things in the trash.



Children this age like to make simple sandwiches.



They can help set the table.



They like to help measure and stir.

Mealtime Manners help make Mealtime Magic.

Children this age are ready to learn even more about how to behave at the table.

Children learn quickly at this age. Calmly teach your child what you expect them to do.



Remind your child:

- We sit down to eat.
- We are polite. We say "please" and "thank you."
- We don't chew and talk at the same time.
- We take small bites.
- We chew our food well, with our mouths closed.
- We swallow our food before we have a drink.

I am going to try some Mealtime Magic!
Here's what I will try to make meals easier and more pleasant:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Do you have questions about your child's eating? Ask your WIC staff.
They can help you with all your nutrition concerns.



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Ages 3 and 4 CN-10

Mealtime Magic



with your 3 or 4 year old

Are you wishing for mealtimes that are pleasant and easy?

Try some **Mealtime Magic** today!

Mealtime Magic is easier when you know what to expect at ages 3 and 4.

Children this age are usually good at feeding themselves. They usually begin to eat a wider variety of foods. Mealtime is getting easier!

Expect children this age to eat better...

- when they are hungry at mealtime.
- when they eat with others, so they can talk!
- when they can show off their new eating skills.
- when they are not forced to eat.
- when they are not distracted by toys or TV.



3 and 4 year olds are learning to use their hands well.



- They can eat neatly and use a napkin.
- They can use a fork and drink well from a cup.
- They make fewer spills and messes.
- They can help fix meals.

3 and 4 year olds still like familiar foods.

- They may still refuse to try new foods, but they will eat a wider variety of foods as they get older.
- They may like vegetables raw, since cooking brings out strong flavors.
- They may eat a new food only after it has been offered many times.

Even the pickiest eater will eat enough to grow and be healthy if the foods you offer are nutritious.

10 tips that work like magic!

Eat together every day!

Children this age love to eat with others, mostly because they love to talk and show off! Eat as many meals together as you can. Family meals help build strong families!

Children eat better when mealtime is pleasant! If you fuss at your child, your child will not eat well. Try not to worry about what or how much your child is eating. Stay calm! Enjoy your own meal and the chance to relax and connect with your family.



Make mealtime pleasant!

Praise still works like magic!

Children this age love attention! They love to learn and practice new skills and they can remember how to act at mealtime. Praise the behaviors you want to see more often and *your child will repeat them!*

You decide what's to eat.

You should decide the foods at each meal. Giving your child a choice between two foods is great--but *you* should decide what the two choices are! Avoid asking your child what he or she wants to eat. Also, don't jump up to make your child some special food. Instead, serve at least one food at every meal that you know your child likes.



Try taking pressure off your child about how much to eat.

Watch what happens when you stop trying to *make* your child eat! *Your child eats better.* At mealtime, let your child decide *what* to eat, from the healthy foods you have fixed. Also let your child decide *how much* to eat. It's important for all of us to eat until we feel full, and then stop.

Make sure your child is hungry for meals!

Children only eat well when they are *hungry!* Healthy snacks are still important but make sure snacks are mid-way between meals. Snacks too close to mealtime will spoil your child's appetite for the meal--and your child will be more likely to pick at the food or refuse to eat.

Eat at a table.

Children eat better if they eat at a table. It helps them focus on eating. They are still easily distracted at this age, so turn off the TV and take toys off the table. Mealtime is a good time to talk together. Take your time and enjoy your food and the chance to relax. Make mealtime special!

Get in a daily routine of meals and snacks.

Child care centers know that *children eat better* when they have a daily schedule of meals and snacks. Children *like* routines. Why? Because routines make them feel safe and secure.



Make clear rules and stick with them.

At this age, children become much more aware of rules and they can remember them. Take advantage of this! Make mealtime rules simple and *stick with them.* Sticking with your rules, day after day, is what makes your child learn them and obey them.

Teach your child about foods!



Your child is learning every day! Teach the names of foods. Talk about their shape, color and taste. Color pictures of food. Explain how you are fixing foods. *You* are your child's best teacher, every day!