

TABLETALK

MARCH, 2010 ❁ CHILD FOOD PROGRAM OF TEXAS ❁ P.O. BOX 5465 ❁ KATY, TX 77491 ❁ 281-395-7000, TOLL-FREE: 877-395-6560, Fax: 281-395-7002

Mealtime Communication

You can make mealtimes even more special by encouraging communication with and between children. When you pay attention to children and encourage them to talk, you help children create a positive view of themselves and the world they live in. Mealtime can be an important time to encourage communication. Make it one of your goals to serve meals in a relaxed, social atmosphere. Children need adults to eat with them. When adults eat with children they can:

- Serve as role models by their food choices,
- Protect children from safety hazards such as choking and cross-contamination when sharing foods, and
- Encourage conversation at mealtime.

What foods present a choking risk for young children?

Toddlers delight in feeding themselves. However, parents and childcare providers need to be cautious with young children at the table.

Foods that are hard, round or difficult to chew can sometimes lodge in small airways, causing a child to choke. To be on the safe side, consider the following advice on finger foods for children less than 3 years of age:

- Don't give hard, or difficult-to-chew-foods such as raw carrots and other crunchy vegetables, hard candy, lollipops, peanuts, and popcorn.
- Modify the shape and texture of firm foods. Cut grapes into quarters; chop apples and firm fruits into very small pieces, and cook carrots and hard vegetables until soft, then cut into small pieces.

Keep an eye on small children when they are eating. Small children may eat in a hurry, stuff too much food in their mouths, or chew their food inadequately. To avoid accidents, children should not be allowed to run or play with food while chewing. Feed small children only when they are sitting down and are in a relaxed atmosphere. Train toddlers to chew their food thoroughly before swallowing.

Best Practices at Mealtimes

Childcare providers who are good role models make mealtime and snacktime positive, cheerful, unhurried events. Providers should sit with children during meal periods, eat the same foods the children do, offer choices and give children an opportunity to serve themselves. They should also engage the children in upbeat food-related conversations, make positive comments about nutrition and encourage, but not require, children to taste all foods. Providers who force children to "clean their plate" and use food as a reward, punishment or pacifier are less likely to help children develop healthy eating behaviors. Working parents who screen day-care centers for good food and nutrition practices can be confident their children are getting the nutrition they need and developing healthy eating habits that can help them avoid diet-related problems as they grow older.



Tips from Chef Bob

STUFFED-CRUST PIZZA

Ingredients: 1 can (13.8 oz) Pillsbury® refrigerated classic pizza crust; 7 sticks (1 oz each) string cheese; 1/2 cup pizza sauce; 24 slices pepperoni (from 3.5-oz package); 2 cups shredded Italian cheese blend (8 oz). **Directions:** Heat oven to 425°F. Grease 12-inch pizza pan with shortening or cooking spray. Unroll dough; place in pan. Starting at center, press out dough to edge of pan, pressing up and extending over sides by at least 1 inch. Place string cheese around inside edge of crust. Fold extended edge of dough over cheese; pinch firmly to seal. Spoon sauce evenly over dough. Top with pepperoni and cheese blend. Bake 12 to 16 minutes or until crust is deep golden brown and cheese in center is melted. Cut into wedges.