

FACT SHEET:



ABIOS

Acquired Brain Injury Outreach Service

Category:

Life After ABI

Parenting

Audience:

Person with an ABI



Mealtimes

Introduction

Mealtimes can be a time for families to come together and talk with each other. Sometimes, however, they can be a time of major disruption in the household. Developing a time for your family to come together is very positive.

How do I know that Mealtimes are a Problem?

- The children do not eat at the same time any night of the week
- Each family member eats different foods at different times
- Sometimes the choices for food are not healthy
- There is little or no opportunity to catch up with each family member during the day
- Mealtimes are disruptive with arguments, yelling, and fighting



For more information
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ABIOS Manager

Prevention Strategies

- Plan ahead: Determine which nights the family can eat together and what the meals are for those nights
- Prepare as much of the meal before as you can, so that you are less stressed surrounding the mealtime
- Place children in strategic places around the table. For example do not place two children who argue constantly next to each other. Have a parent sit between them.
- At first, choose meals that the majority of your family like and give much smaller servings to children. (They can always ask for more!)
- Set the table with all requirements prior to the meal. The children can help in this process. For example placemats or tablecloth, utensils, glasses, water jug and serviettes or paper towels.
- Turn off the television and other distractions before you sit down at the table. If you answer the telephone make it quick and tell the person you will ring them back at a more appropriate time.
- Have special nights when you can, as a family or individually, do different things like having a TV dinner where you may watch a family movie or a picnic outside on a weekend night. These nights should be scheduled during the school holidays or weekends when you can be a little more flexible about bedtime.

Management Strategies

- When dinner is ready ask for all family members to sit at the table at their places.
- Ensure children have brought only themselves to the table. That is, no extras like toys, books, or electronic devices
- Ensure each family member gets some time to discuss things. Topics may include:
 - ◊ their day (for example what they liked and disliked about their day)
 - ◊ upcoming events
 - ◊ important occasions within your family
 - ◊ share your day with your children.
- Misbehaviour is dealt with appropriately and quickly. This ensures the rest of the family can enjoy the meal and the time together.
- Set a kitchen timer on the table. Set the timer for the amount of time you want the meal to be eaten in, for example 20 minutes. If they finish their meal in 20 minutes they get dessert. If someone is in time-out the timer keeps going. There should be no prodding, nor nagging about eating. If the timer goes there is no dessert, at least not yet. The plate goes into the kitchen and onto the counter. Cover the plate with plastic wrap. After half an hour the child has the right to finish the meal if they wish. If they finish the meal this time they get dessert. If not, no dessert for that night.
- For children who are fussy eaters, they can choose to eat 3 out of the 4 items presented on their plate. They have to try the fourth food but do not have to eat it all before getting dessert.

Acknowledgement:

We acknowledge that in the development of the ABIOS Parenting fact sheets we have incorporated ideas from the 1-2-3 Magic Program and The Triple P program.

Key Steps

- Prepare ahead of time
- Ensure all distractions are turned off
- Ensure children are seated at the table in appropriate places
- Ensure each family member gets the opportunity to talk
- Act on misbehaviour appropriately and quickly

Resources

See other Acquired Brain Injury Outreach Service (ABIOS) Information sheets at <http://www.health.qld.gov.au/abios/>



Notes:
