

Top Tips to Reducing Screen time at Mealtimes



Sometimes when children have eating difficulties, parents find that screen time is the only way they can get their child to eat.

Why should we not use screens during mealtimes?

If your child is watching a screen while eating, this

- **Can be distracting** the child from eating and learning about food.
- **Means that your child is missing out on the social experience** of mealtime
- Your child will miss out on the **positive experiences of eating** and to *wanting* to eat!
- Children with oral motor difficulties will not learn how to **move the food** around their mouth or how to chew their food.

How do we reduce/eliminate screen time during mealtimes?

- The **best practice** is to remove all screens from the room that you are eating!
- **MODEL!!** You need to show your child how to eat without a screen. If you are using a screen, your child will want to copy you!
- You should give your child a **'safe food'** during mealtimes. A 'safe food' is a food that your child is happy and comfortable eating without a screen or distraction.

If removing the screen altogether is too difficult, you could try the following:

- If your child watches a specific programme, then try starting the programme 5 minutes into the programme so it comes to a natural end about 5 minutes before the meal time is finished – then you can say ‘finished..’ and switch it off.
- Starting at the **beginning of mealtimes** (use this if your child will stop eating when the screen is removed): give the screen 1 minute into the meal. When he can cope with this, increase this to 2 minutes, then 3 minutes etc. You can choose the time intervals yourself depending on your child.
- Starting at the **end of mealtimes** (use this if your child won’t start eating without a screen): 1 minute before the end of the mealtime, remove the screen. When he gets used to this, increase this to 2 minutes, then 3 minutes etc. You can choose the time intervals depending on your child.
- If the above does not work, you can try by **replacing this with a toy**. You can do the above process with the toy once he is no longer using a screen.

Screens include computers; TV; phones/mobiles; tablets and iPad



Start trying this when you are more relaxed for time so that you can implement the new strategies more effectively.

Be consistent!

Repetition makes it easier to learn!

Routine will help your child to understand what is expected.