



Movement Before Mealtimes



Movement can help children feel happy, calm and ready to eat. Some children need more movement than others to help their bodies feel regulated.

Try 5–10 minutes of movement before meals. Choose activities based on how your child is feeling:

Low energy: try activities that wake up and alert the body.

Lots of energy: start with a high-energy activity, then move to heavy work to help the body calm and get ready to eat.

Finish with a clear transition, such as: “Our body is ready. Now it’s time to sit for dinner.”

Here are some examples of activities you can try!

Whole body movement – helpful for those children who need to use up energy before sitting



Jumping: On the spot, trampoline or off a step



Spinning and stopping game (both directions to prevent overstimulation)



Obstacle course to get to the table: under chair, over cushions, jump on a beanbag



Dancing to music: short dance or workout video to follow

‘Heavy Work’ - helpful for calming, organising and improving body awareness



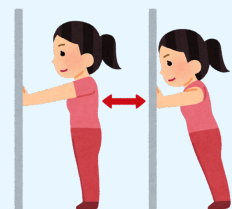
Lifting plates, cups and cutlery to set the table



Pushing the chairs to the table



Yoga poses or animal walks across the room



Wall pushes

Calming Activities



Deep pressure input - firm squeezes to arms/shoulder (if tolerates)



Bear hugs or rolling in a blanket



Deep breathing - sniff the flower and blow the candle



Rainbow breathing with arm movements

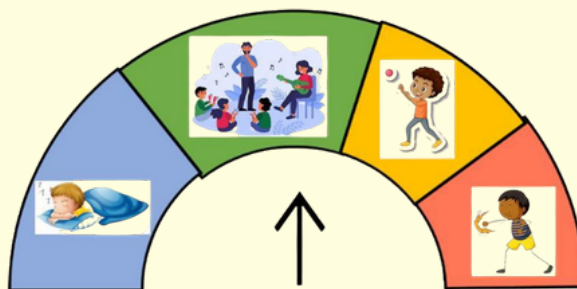
Click [here](#) to find out more about: What is regulation?

Supporting Self-Regulation Skills

Teach your child to recognise and manage their own needs, for example:

“Your body looks wiggly” – “Do you need a movement break?”

Offer choices e.g., movement away from the table vs staying seated with support



Movement during mealtimes is often a regulation strategy rather than misbehaviour. By supporting your child's sensory and postural needs, adapting expectations, and providing structured opportunities for movement, we can help children actively engage in mealtimes in a positive and functional way.

