

# O is for **OBESITY PREVENTION**

## Preventing Obesity With Responsive Feeding

While many factors can increase the risk of obesity in early childhood, parents and caregivers serve an important role in obesity prevention through “responsive parenting.” Responsive parenting is the ability of a parent to interpret a child’s signals and respond appropriately with warmth and support. There are four areas of responsive parenting, including feeding, soothing, sleep, and physical activity. Responsive feeding is the process of recognizing and responding to a child’s hunger and fullness cues. Research shows responsive feeding is one of the key steps to preventing early childhood obesity.

## Strategies For Responsive Feeding

Here are five strategies for parents and caregivers to practice responsive feeding.

### **Strategy 1. Provide a calm and comfortable place for a child to eat.**

- Hold your baby upright when feeding her a bottle or breastfeeding.
- Sit your young child in a high chair or secure seat facing you.
- Turn off all electronic devices during meal and snack times.

### **Strategy 3. Offer food that is healthy, tasty, and provided on a schedule.**

- Aim to have regular family meals together by the time your child is 1 year old.
- Make one meal for the entire family and offer your child the same healthy foods as the rest of the family by age 2.
- Provide toddlers with three meals and two to three healthy snacks at regular mealtimes each day.

### **Strategy 5: Encourage self-regulation.**

- Plan what your child will eat, when she will eat, and where.
- Understand it is your child’s choice to decide whether to eat and how much.
- Avoid using food or other treats as a reward.

### **Strategy 2. Offer age appropriate “first foods?”**

- Provide breastmilk or iron-fortified formula as the main source of food for the first 6 months of your child’s life and continue until they are at least 1 year old.
- Give your child solid foods after they are 6 months old and can sit up with little or no support, maintain head and neck control, and munch and swallow.
- If feeding your child packaged baby foods, choose ones with a single ingredient and no added sugar.

### **Strategy 4. Respond promptly to a child’s signs of hunger and fullness.**

- Learn your child’s hunger and fullness cues and respond accordingly.
- Feed your child when he opens his mouth when a spoon is near, reaches for or points to a spoon or food, or gets excited when food is provided.
- Stop feeding a child when she shakes her head, turns her head away from food, or does not open her mouth.

## What We Are Doing

The Anita Zucker Center and its affiliates help translate community nutrition research for parents and practitioners to improve nutrition related programs and policies.