

How to Increase Time in the Chair at Mealtimes

1. Get energy out right before mealtimes

- a. Let them jump, run, crash, and play in the 10-15 minutes before a meal
- b. Give yourself time to transition to the table
- c. Try to always give them multiple warnings- 5 mins, 1 min, 10 more jumps, etc
- d. Notice your child's behavior- does jumping amp them up too much? Have them push something heavy to the table or around the house

2. Create a mealtime routine that preps them to know what is coming

- a. Make it something that your child enjoys
- b. Wash hands in a silly way
- c. Have your child help set the table
- d. Have your child help gather siblings or other parents

3. Set a timer- visual timer apps for the phone are great

- a. Start introducing this at a meal that is MOST successful
- b. Learning to understand a timer is a skill- they need to be taught what it means
- c. Start with reasonable expectations- 3-5 minutes- increasing every week until 10-15 minutes
- d. Can also start this with toys at the table if meals are too difficult

4. Give them praise/ attention for being at the table

- a. Children often get up for the attention- give them attention instead for doing what you want
- b. Make mealtimes a time that they have unlimited access to your attention
- c. Be playful with the food on your plate

5. Make sure they are part of the clean-up process

- a. Have your child bring their plate/cup to the sink if possible
- b. Have your child wipe their space

Other tips

- Work on attention and sitting in times other than mealtimes- have a fine motor time (puzzles, blocks, playdoh) once per day where you set the timer
- Use First/Then language- First we sit at the table, then we can go get_____
- Adjust the timer if you realize that you need to bail!
- Start slow- this is a new expectation, and you and your child need to get used to it