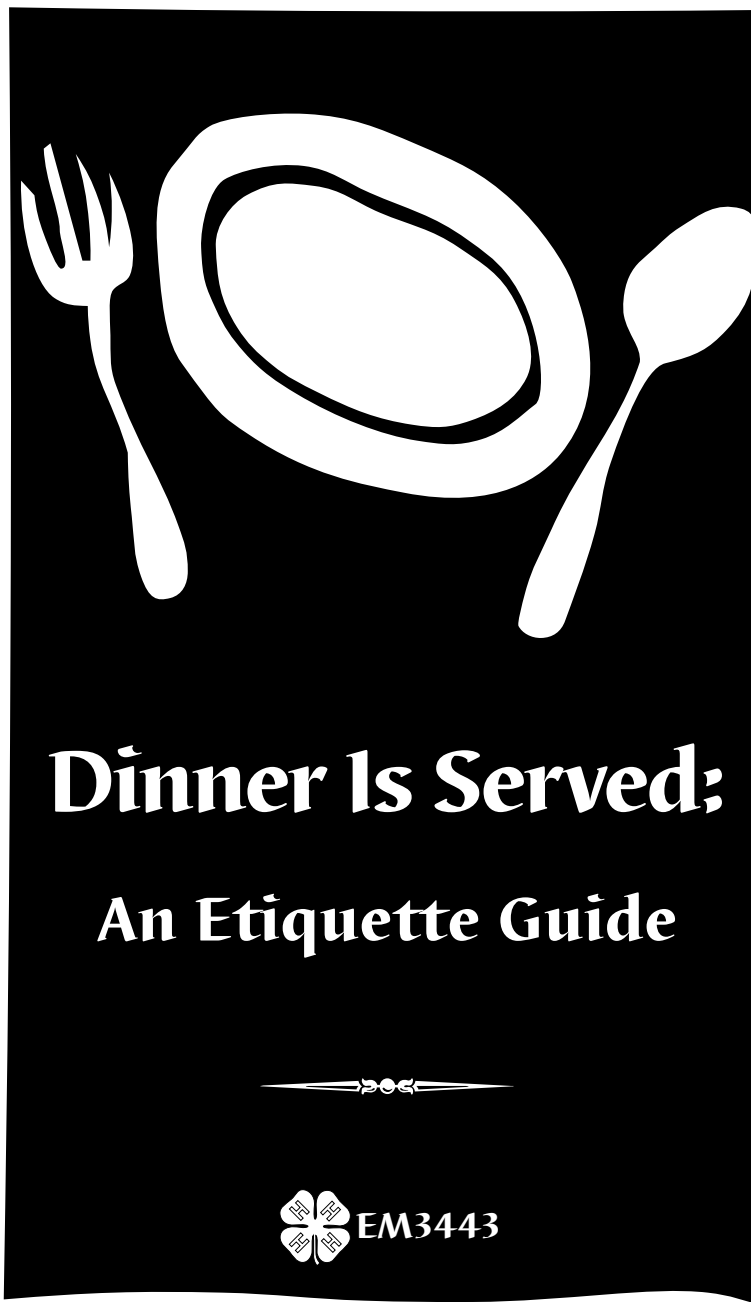


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EM3443

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## **Dinner Is Served: An Etiquette Guide**

Whether you are preparing food for guests or for the family, a pleasant atmosphere helps good food taste better.

Courtesies extended to family members and guests put everyone at ease. You have responsibilities as a guest and as a host or hostess. When practiced daily, courtesies require no special thought or effort. Courtesy is kindly consideration of others. Etiquette is graciousness that comes from the heart. It is not stiff formality.

Traditions reflect an earlier age. The dining traditions outlined here come from a time when the nuclear family with a male head of household and his wife served as host and hostess. If your family situation differs, adapt these guidelines to make them work for you.



### **As Host or Hostess**

For an informal occasion call guests on the telephone or write an informal invitation. When the occasion is formal, invitations written on note cards are more usual. If response is critical, place

*“R.S.V.P.”* in the lower left corner. (*R.S.V.P.* is French for: *“Repondez S’il vous plait.”* It means “Please reply.”)

Always let guests know what time they are expected. Give an indication of the type of occasion, a backyard picnic, family dinner, or reception for newlyweds, to allow the guest to dress appropriately.



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A courteous guest always lets the hostess know if he or she is able to accept the invitation. For an informal occasion this may be done by telephone or by writing a brief note. For a formal occasion, a written note following the form of the invitation is called for. Response to invitations should be made promptly, if possible within a day of when the invitation is received.

Greet guests with warmth. Be sincere. Help them feel you really enjoy having them in your home.

Be sure that everyone meets everyone else, but not all at once. Introduce a stranger to a few people at one time.

When making introductions, the person deserving respect is introduced to the other party. Pronounce each name clearly and distinctly. Sometimes a word about a common interest will help conversation, but don't give a biographical sketch.

When introducing someone simply say things like, "Mother, this is Susie Brown," "Mr. Black, John Brown," "Mrs. Smith, may I present Mr. Jones?"

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### **As a Guest**

Be prompt. Know what time you are expected to arrive. If you have questions about appropriate dress, ask the host or hostess when the invitation is received.

When acknowledging an introduction, simply say "How do you do." It may help you to remember a name if you repeat it. Listen carefully for names. It is embarrassing not to be able to call someone by name when you met them only a few minutes earlier.

Conversation takes two or more people. Don't dominate the conversation. Suggest news or incidents that will be of interest to others. Avoid unpleasant or argumentative topics.

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### **Table Settings and Table Service**

The table setting you choose depends on the food to be served and the atmosphere you wish to create. The convenience and comfort of the diner is your primary consideration.

Basic guidelines for setting a table exist, but no hard and fast rules. Customs change. Seldom do we see maids and butlers in American homes today. Family members usually prepare, serve, and enjoy the food. Informal service is more in accord with a relaxed, comfortable atmosphere. However, a casual atmosphere is no excuse for carelessness.

Table linens, china, silverware, and glassware are accumulated over time. Some are received as gifts. Some are selected by the family. This may result in a combination of many designs and patterns.

When you select table service, choose a design and pattern that will complement many home surroundings and types of food service. Most people do not own completely different sets of table service for different atmospheres.

When you select linens, china, glassware, or silverware, consider your likes and dislikes. Do you prefer the clean lines of contemporary designs, the spartan lines of modern designs, or the softer, more elaborate lines of traditional ones? Does your family prefer casual dining? Will there be times when you wish to serve food more formally? Consider the practical use of tableware. Are the shapes easy to handle? Can they be washed in the dishwasher? Are they easy to store?

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## Table Linens

The term linen describes any type of table cover. Table linens may be linen, cotton, straw, wood fiber, plastic, paper, jute, or synthetic fibers.

Background materials coordinate with the other elements of the table and suggest a mood. The fineness and natural sheen of linen damask makes it a pleasant background for fine bone china, delicate crystal, and highly polished silverware. Lace, hand-embroidered linen, organdy, and smooth finish cotton all suggest lightness and delicacy.

Fabrics with coarse textures, art and crash linens, cotton with novelty weaves, grass, raffia, and jute, have a feeling of depth. They are suitable companions for sturdier china, pottery, or earthenware; short-stemmed, heavier glassware; and heavy silverware.

Plastics, and paper are real time-savers. However, don't let them lead you into careless habits. Choose them just as carefully as you would more expensive materials. Good design, color, and texture in these materials are becoming more readily available. You can find colors and designs to fit most occasions.

When you use a full-sized table cover, it should hang evenly over each edge of the table. Use a silence cloth with a full-sized cloth to absorb the sound and protect the tabletop from stains and heat marks. Do not use a silence cloth with a lace cloth. If the tabletop will stain, place hot pads under hot dishes.

Placemats are acceptable substitutes for table settings for any occasion. They are not considered an easy substitute for a tablecloth. Choose them with care to form the background for the table setting. Choose table cover colors that complement and blend with the color of the china. (China describes all dishes: bone china, earthenware, ceramic, plastic, or glass.)

Deep, vivid tones make dramatic backgrounds; china, silver, and glassware will stand out sharply. Certain colors suggest different moods. Red, yellow, or orange and intense, bright colors suggest informality and gaiety. Blue and green tend to be more subdued, more dignified. Pastels seem feminine and delicate. Neutrals are cool and dignified. Natural and earthy colors are homey, casual, and informal. Choose a color that makes a pleasant background for the food you will serve as well as the china.

Pattern in the background helps build character and influences other choices in table decor. You may use more than one pattern, but this takes care and skill. A great deal of pattern can be overpowering. The beauty of the patterns may be lost in the confusion. The general guideline is use one plain element on the table.

If you are limited in the choice of china, silverware, and glassware, set the mood with the table cover. You can have a variety of table covers at less cost than several sets of china, glassware, and silverware.

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## Table Service

Plain with plain is a safe combination. But, this can make a table too monotonous. If china, glass, and silver are plain, bring in color and pattern with the table cover and decorative accessories. If china, silver, and glassware are highly patterned, establish unity with a plain background and keep table accessories to a minimum.

Silver, china, and glassware that are elaborately decorated, not boldly decorated, suggest formality. Thin china and glassware usually suggest formality. Symmetrical and delicate designs, soft, subdued, or rich (but not

vivid) colors are considered formal; whereas, sturdy, short-stemmed glassware and heavier china suggest informality.

Use service sets that match each other. Heavy pottery overpowers delicate glassware and dainty silver. Avoid mixing bold and dainty designs. A bold pattern in china or glassware dominates dainty silverware.

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### Plan the Seating Arrangement

Family members may have a favorite place at the table. For example, mother and father may sit at opposite ends of the table. Seat anyone who waits on the table near the kitchen.

When you invite guests, plan the seating arrangement in advance. The hostess indicates to guests where to be seated. Seat guests for their comfort. Custom suggests that a female guest be seated to the right of the host and a male guest to the right of the hostess. Your plan will depend on who the guests are, how many are to be seated, and where the table is situated.

You may wish to seat people on both sides of a long table, with no one at either end, making conversation easier. Seating people at only two sides of a table placed against a wall is an interesting change. In this case, place table decorations off center.

Diners stand behind their chairs until the hostess is ready to be seated. Men and boys seat the women and girls then stand behind their chairs until all the women are seated. To avoid confusion, be seated and rise from the same side of your chair as others at the table, usually the left side.

The host or hostess cues everyone to begin eating. Be alert to the type of table service used. Anticipate others' needs. Pass food that is in front of you. The host or hostess gives the cue to leave the table. Leave the napkin on the table. If it is necessary for you to leave the table before the end of the meal, ask the host or hostess to excuse you.

A few sincere words of appreciation for fine food endears you as a guest or family member.

If you have too many people to be seated comfortably, consider serving from a buffet. Seat diners at small tables or give them lap trays.

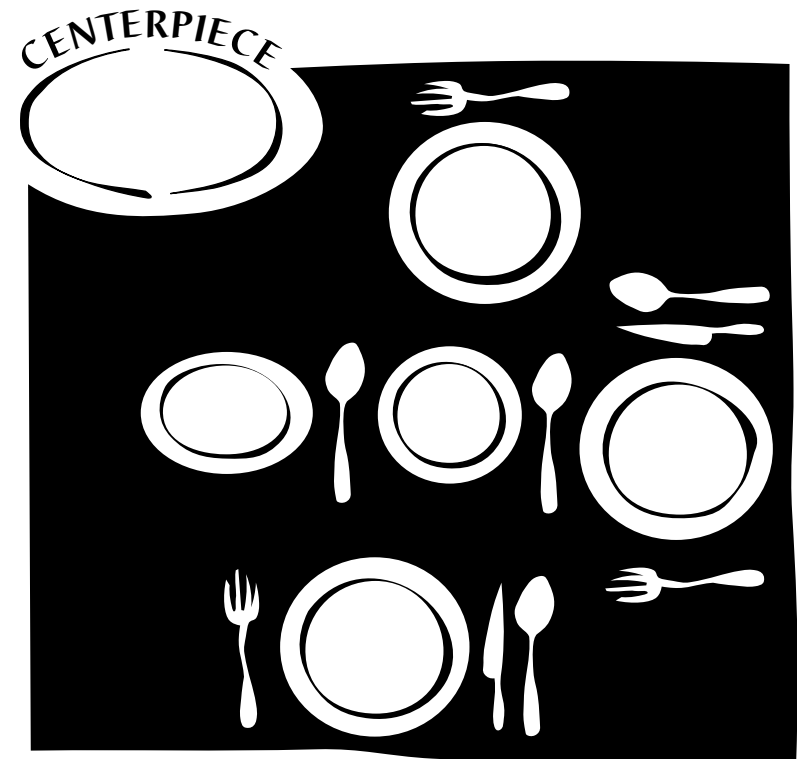


Figure 1. Seating arrangement with guests at two sides of a table, family-style service.

## Setting the Table

Place rectangular placemats with the long edge parallel to and close to the table edge. Place round mats close to the table edge.

If table space permits, allow 24" to 30" for each place setting. A setting includes the silverware, china, glassware, and napkin for each individual. A person seated at the table needs this amount of space to feel comfortable.

Each setting should be obvious. Avoid a cluttered look by placing table service, serving dishes and utensils, and accessories to form lengthwise or crosswise lines with the table edge.

Which china, silverware, and glassware you place at the settings before diners are seated depends on the type of service you plan. The simplest way to space settings is to mark each one with a plate. If plates are not placed ahead, mark one setting with a plate and space the remaining ones. The dinner plate is the center of the setting. Put the edge of the dinner plate about 1" from the table edge.

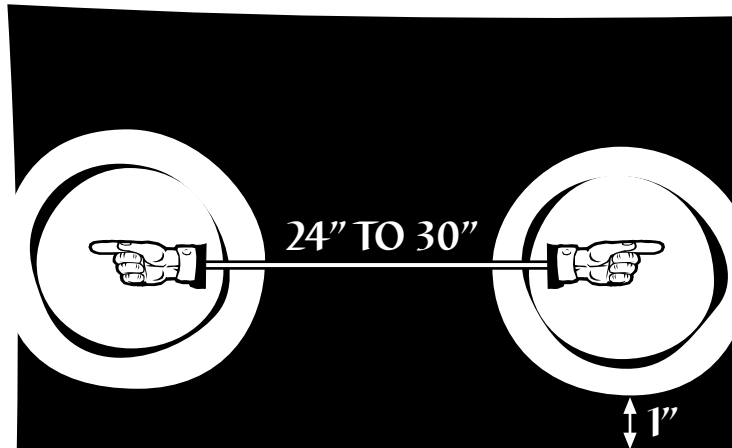


Figure 2. Allow 24" to 30" for each setting.

Place knives to the right of the plate, cutting edge toward the plate. Position spoons next to the knives with bowls up. Put fork tines up and to the left of the plate.

Line pieces of silverware parallel to one another with handles even and about 1" from the table edge. Silverware (flatware) is placed in order of use; put the first piece to be used at the outside of the setting. Some pieces of silver may be placed on or below a plate when a course is served.

Place a bread and butter plate just above the dinner fork. Place a butter spreader on the bread and butter plate with the cutting edge toward the center of the plate either parallel or at right angles to the table edge, or diagonally across the plate.

When no knife is used, put the fork on either the right or left. When two forks and two spoons are used, put the forks on the left and the spoons on the right.



Figure 3. A setting for a salad luncheon, no knife needed.

Put the napkin to the left of the forks. Fold it simply in a square or rectangle with the lower open corner nearest the plate. If the napkin is in the center of the setting on a plate, put the loose-edged corner to the right.

To serve individual salads as an accompaniment to a course, place the salad bowl or plate to the left of the forks and napkin. A setting may become crowded with both bread and butter plates and individual salad plates. Think through the arrangement when you plan the menu. If table space is crowded, you may decide not to serve individual salads, or you may serve a bread on the dinner plate. When no bread and butter plate is used, put the individual salad plate above the dinner fork.

Position the water glass at the tip of the dinner knife (or where the knife would be normally). If a second beverage is served, place the second glass to the right of the water glass and slightly forward.

Put the cup and saucer for a hot beverage to the right of the spoons. The saucer's edge may be in line with the lower edge of the dinner plate or on a line that is slightly below the center of the dinner plate. Place the cup handle at a slight angle or parallel to the table edge. Either position is convenient for picking up the cup.

If a beverage is served after dinner, place the cup and saucer in the center of the setting.

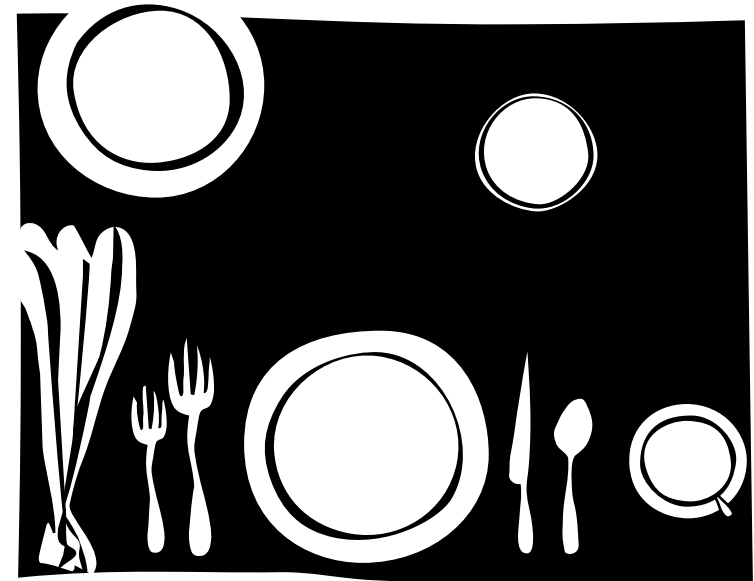


Figure 4. A setting for family-style service with individual salad.

Place salt and pepper shakers within easy reach of diners. Put individual salt and pepper shakers at the top of each setting or between every two diners.

Position relishes, pickles, butter, and other accompaniments neatly with service silver on the table beside them. Cream and sugar may be placed on the table or served with the beverage. Chilled relishes should be cold and placed just before the food is served. Hot rolls should be well-heated and placed at the last moment.

Place individual settings for breakfast; salad and soup, or sandwich lunches; or dessert luncheons with only the silver, china, and glassware needed for the food served at the table. Keep the settings as uncluttered and convenient as possible.

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## Table Decorations

Choose and arrange table decorations with great care. Restraint and harmony are primary considerations. Table decorations should complement the table setting and food. An overdecorated table is undesirable.

Flowers, fruits, and candles are the most common table decorations although other items in character with the mood can add interest. Natural flowers and fruits lend more grace to a table than imitation ones. However, good quality silk flowers are acceptable.

Harmonize colors with the color scheme of the table settings and other appointments. Floral containers, candleholders, bowls, and plates can be wood, metal, glass, china, raffia, jute, straw, etc. The containers should match the flowers, candles, fruits or vegetables, and the china, glassware, and silver.

The table decorations should not dominate. Keep central decorations low so guests and family can see each other. Always light candles. Some people suggest that candles only be used late in the afternoon or at night when light is needed. Use enough candles to provide adequate light for dining. Candles should stand above or below eye level so that the light is not annoying.

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## Types of Service

Family traditions, age of children, kitchen and dining arrangements, facilities for food service, time available, and number to be seated will influence the type of service you choose.

**Family Service.** This is a comfortable, casual type of service if carefully planned. Everything is ready when the diners are seated. Place dinner plates and individual salad plates at individual settings. Put the food in serving dishes and place on the table with service silver on the table beside the dish. The person nearest a food places the silver in it and offers it to the next person. Unless passing is done with some kind of order, confusion results. The host may avoid this confusion by serving the main dish first, then passing it to the right. It is common practice to pass everything to the right. The food is passed around the table and returned to its original place.

A variation is to have all dinner plates placed at the setting of the host or hostess who serves the main course and passes the plates to each person: down one side of the table, then down the other. Accidents are less apt to occur when heavy, hot serving dishes do not need to be handled. This method is commonly used when there are small children at the table. Accessory foods such as bread, butter, jellies, pickles, and relishes are passed after the main dishes.

A side table or cart placed to the left of the hostess is a great help. Place cold or hot beverages, extra breads or other foods on the cart. Following a course, the serving dishes and individual plates are passed to the hostess who stacks them on the cart.

You may place the dessert on the cart before the meal is served. Individual dessert dishes may be passed, followed by the dessert. People serve themselves, or the dessert may be served in individual dishes.

Beverages are usually served by the hostess. Cups are passed to the hostess for filling.

If no cart is used, clear the table of dishes between each course by passing the dishes to someone responsible for table service who then removes them to the kitchen.



**English Service.** English service is considered by some to be family service. Also informal, it is gracious and hospitable. All food is served at the table by the host or hostess. If there are both a host and hostess, usually the host serves the meat and perhaps a vegetable. The hostess serves the other vegetables, sauces, and gravy. The hostess serves the soup, beverage, and possibly salad and dessert. The host may serve the dessert while the hostess serves the beverage.

Position foods to be served by the host and hostess in front of their settings with service silver beside them. Put dinner plates in front of the host, to the left of the setting.

Traditionally, English service is carried out by an attendant who places the plates at each setting after they have been served. However, English service can be carried out with ease and grace without an attendant. The host places food on the plate, passes it to his left to the hostess who places food on it, then usually passes it to the person immediately to her right. The hostess may serve herself or the person on her immediate right first. All the people down that side of the table are served in order. The plates are then passed to the host's right until all on that side have been served. No preference is given age or sex.

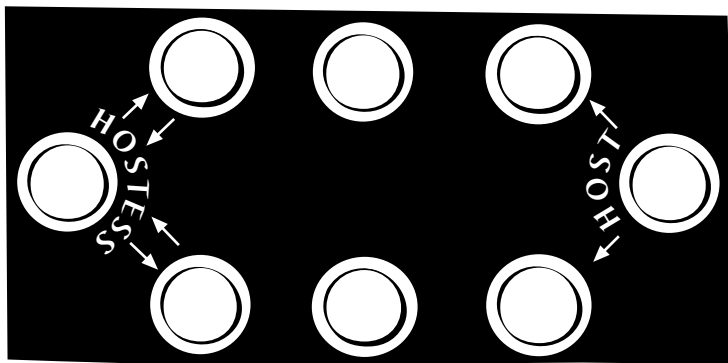


Figure 5. Plates are served by the host and hostess and passed in order to guests along the sides of the table. The host serves himself last.

Remove all serving dishes and plates at the end of each course. A family member or attendant removes the main platter first, then vegetable dishes, china, and silver from each individual setting and then the accessory dishes. Do not stack dishes as they are removed.

Place beverage, cups and saucers, and cream and sugar in front of the hostess. Do not lift to the pot; leave on the tray or table to pour. Put the spoon on the saucer. The hostess asks the guest's preference for cream and sugar. Beverage and dessert are passed in the same manner as other foods. To avoid confusion, the hostess specifies to whom the first cup goes.

**Russian Service.** This service is used for formal luncheons and dinners. When properly done, it is an elaborate type of service and not practical for home use. All food is served from the kitchen by an attendant.

**Compromise Service.** Compromise service is an informal type of service that combines Russian and English service. Some of the courses are served by the host or hostess and some from the kitchen. The appetizer is in place when diners are seated. The host or hostess serves the main course and the dessert from the kitchen. All service dishes and individual dishes are removed between each course.

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## Method of Serving

A meal may be served using either right- or left-hand service regardless of whether family, English, or Russian service is used. Once you choose a method, be consistent.

For right-hand service, the person serving, attendant or family member, stands to the right of the person being served and places and removes dishes from the right with the right hand.

Since it is inconsiderate to reach in front of someone, the breads and dishes to the left of the setting are placed and removed from the left with the left hand. Foods offered for the individual to serve himself or herself are passed from the left with the left hand.

Place and remove dishes from the left with the left hand in left-hand service. To avoid reaching in front of someone, the beverages and other foods placed to the right of the cover are placed with the right hand from the right side.

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### Last-Minute Check

Before guests or family members are seated, make a final check of the table. See that everything you need is on the table or convenient on the side cart or in the kitchen.

- Adjust heat, light, and ventilation for comfortable dining.
- Fill water glasses about three-fourths full with iced water, but don't serve ice in water. Ice is served in iced tea.
- Chilled foods should be quite cold and placed just before the diners are seated.
- Place breads at the last moment to keep them hot.
- Give yourself a moment to relax. Freshen up a bit; then invite the family and guests to be seated to enjoy a relaxed, friendly meal.



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### Etiquette While Eating

Take part in table conversation. Initiate pleasant topics. Avoid talking about food likes and dislikes. It may embarrass both you and the host or hostess. Avoid talking with food in your mouth, or asking others questions when they have food in their mouths. It is difficult to speak clearly with food in your mouth. Chew quietly, with your mouth closed. Place eating utensils on the plate when you talk or pass food. Service utensils will be provided for foods that you serve yourself. Use them. Don't use your own utensils to serve food.

When a choice of food or beverage is offered, choose one promptly.

Sit erect at the table. Avoid placing arms or elbows on the table. If you want something, ask for it. Don't reach in front of others.

**Handling Utensils.** Knowing how to use utensils comfortably adds to your enjoyment of good food. When cutting food, hold the knife and fork by the handle. The fork tines are down. The ends of the handles rest in the palm of the hand and are not seen. You may extend the index finger along the handle to steady the utensil.

Carry food to the mouth with a fork or spoon. In the United States most people eat with the fork tines up. However, in Europe and some other countries, food may be carried on the back of the fork with tines down. Only carry the amount of food that will stay on the fork. Use the side of the fork to cut whenever possible. You may cut salad greens with a knife. However, most salad ingredients should be bite-sized.

Use a knife or butter spreader to spread butter on bread or rolls. Butter a small amount of bread at a time. Break off a small piece and place it on the bread and butter plate or on the edge of the dinner plate. Spread a whole slice of bread only if you are spreading toast or making a sandwich.

Use a spoon to stir a hot beverage. Remove the spoon from the cup and place it on the saucer. When eating with a spoon, dip toward you and take food from the end of the spoon. Soup spoons are designed to sip soup from the side of the spoon. Dip soup away from you.

When drinking from a cup or mug with a handle, hold the handle only with the thumb and forefinger. Let the cup handle rest on the middle finger. Curve the other two fingers into the palm of the hand.

Handle a stemmed glass by the stem with the bowl resting on the thumb and first finger. The other fingers rest on the stem and are curved into the palm of the hand.

Hold a glass or mug without a handle with one hand. Don't "cuddle" it.

**Finger Foods.** Informal dining may include finger foods. When food service is formal, avoid serving such foods. Breads, sandwiches, and rolls are finger foods. Hot sandwiches and hearty sandwiches with thick fillings or those made from large rolls may require the use of a knife and fork.

Take fresh vegetables and fruits from the serving dish and eat with your fingers if no service utensils are provided.

When dips are served, provide a service utensil and plates for guests. Help yourself to dip and accompaniments, and dip the food into the dip on your plate. Do not dip directly from the serving dish.

Small pieces of fried chicken, shrimp with tails on, corn on the cob, and similar foods with natural "handles" may be eaten with the fingers. Handle them delicately, with one hand if possible.

Remove fruit pits, fish bones, seeds, and skins from the mouth with your fingers; place on the side of the plate.

When you have finished your meal, place your knife and fork in the center of your plate. This shows the hostess that you are finished.

As a host or hostess, do all that you can to provide for the comfort of guests. As a guest, respond to the host or hostess with grace and appreciation.

