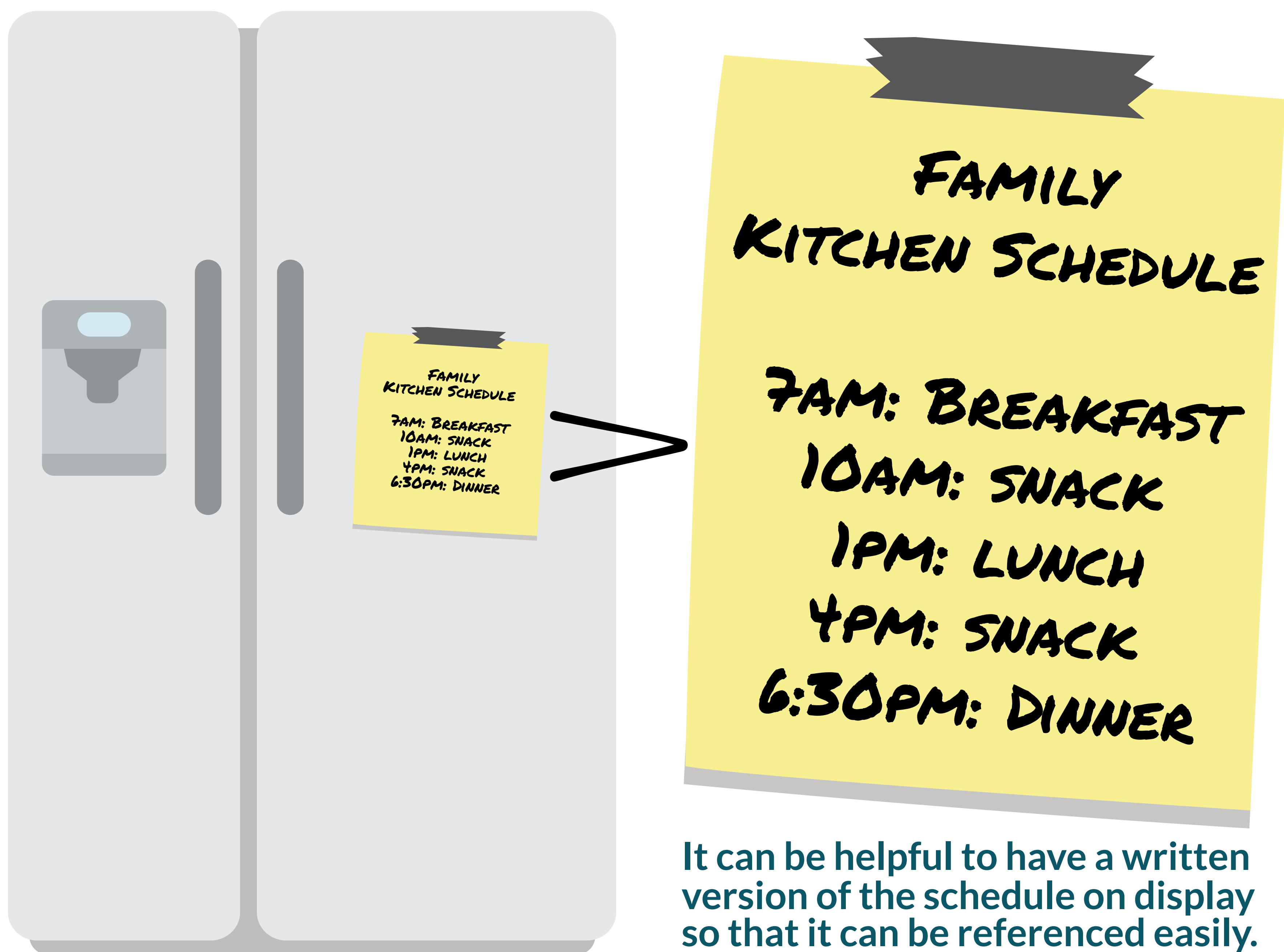


Establishing a Mealtime Routine

A common side-effect of corticosteroids is a significant increase in appetite and food cravings. Developing a meal and snack schedule can prevent excessive or unhealthy snacking throughout the day in cases where excessive weight gain is a concern or when the ability to self-regulate food intake is impaired due to medication.



As possible, scheduled meal and snack times should remain consistent from day to day and should apply to the entire family. Having a family-based approach to meals and snacks not only prevents the singling out of the family member undergoing medical treatment, but also promotes eating habits that benefit the health of everyone in the family.

Meal and snack schedules should be thoroughly communicated with all family members. For example, it will be understood within the family that an opportunity to have a snack or meal will be every 3-4 hours, but food will not be available in between scheduled times. Some children (specifically older children and adolescents) can help to develop the meal schedule based on preferences and other activities. Younger children may benefit from schedules based solely off of parental discretion.

If having a consistent daily meal and snack routine is not realistic based on family dynamic or schedule, the benefits of a mealtime routine can still be obtained by communicating and maintaining **consistent expectations** surrounding meals and snacks. Expectations should remain consistent even though meal and snack times may be changing from day to day. Like a meal and snack schedule, expectations surrounding meal and snack time should be clearly communicated to all participants and should apply to the entire family. Examples of expectations include:

- **Where meals and snacks are to be eaten**
- **What electronic devices are able to be used during meals and snacks**
- **How long meal or family members are expected to sit at the table**
- **If the meal or snack is not wanted, what other options will be made available**
- **Responsibilities related to meal/snack planning, food preparation, table setting, and clean up**

For children who are not old enough to obtain their own food, practicing the **division of responsibility** can help maintain healthy food boundaries while still promoting autonomy around eating.

The Division of Responsibility:



Maintaining the division of responsibility can be especially helpful for picky eaters or children with food fixations (only interested in eating a few select foods for extended periods of time). Many times, children will not try new foods because they know that a backup of their favorite meal will be available, or they will be able to fill up on snacks after mealtime is over. With a meal schedule, your child will learn they will not have an opportunity to eat again until the next designated meal or snack time, and will be more likely to taste and eat food that is available.