



## Food Delay

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### Definition

**F**ood delay is a procedure in which a meal is contingently delayed for a period of up to 2 hours. This does not cover delay of food within the normal mealtime but delay beyond the normal mealtime.

### Things to Do

- ✓ Pinpoint the behavior.
- ✓ Specify when and how long food will be delayed.
- ✓ Obtain parent(s) consent.
- ✓ Inform administration and food service.
- ✓ Explain program to student.
- ✓ Collect and review data.

## ✓ Pinpoint the behavior.

Begin by pinpointing academic, social, or classroom behaviors that you want to change. Make sure the behaviors are observable and measurable. In other words, things that you can see and count.

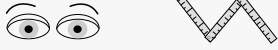
For instance, this is too vague . . .

During recess,  
Jim should stop  
bullying others.

Instead . . .

Jim will not hit  
or push others  
during recess.

. . . is a behavior that you  
can see and measure.



Observable & Measurable

- Easily observed
- Countable
- Beginning/end
- Repeatable

## ✓ Specify when and how long food will be delayed.

Specify when and how long to delay food from the student. For example . . .



Remember, food *cannot* be *totally* denied any student, and the delay must be *no longer* than 2 hours.

Cassandra must finish her math assignment before going to lunch. She may eat lunch when she completes her work or within 10 minutes before the lunch period ends.

## ✓ Obtain parent(s) consent.

Food delay is a mildly intrusive procedure that requires parents'/guardians' consent. First, describe the procedures and reasons for using a food delay program. Then ask if delaying a meal will affect the student's health or behavior (e.g., low blood sugar, interactions with medications, diabetes). If the student's health is ensured and the parents agree to the program, have them sign an Informed Consent Form. However, if they choose not to sign the Informed Consent Form, do not start the program.

## ✓ Inform administration and food service.

Explain to your administration the need for a food delay program. Also, talk with the food service staff so that if necessary the food can be routed to your classroom or withheld if the student falsely attempts to get food.

## ✓ Explain program to student.

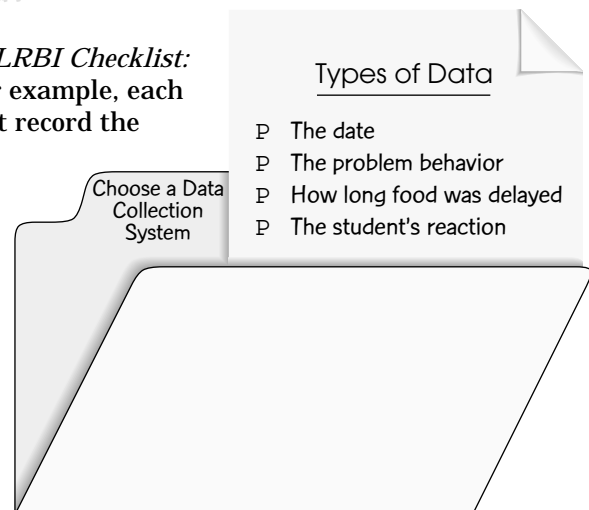
Begin by describing the behavior you want to work on with the student. Then explain the food delay program. Clearly identify what behaviors will cause food to be delayed and how long the delay will last. Also review what behaviors will help the student to avoid food delay. Remind him that eventually he'll get the meal but that it may be delayed depending upon his behavior. Finally, let him know that his parents have agreed to this program.

## ✓ Collect and review data.

Design and use a data collection system (see *LRBI Checklist: Preliminary Strategies—Data Collection*). For example, each time the behavior is used, an instructor might record the following:

- 📄 The date
- 📄 The problem behavior.
- 📄 How long food was delayed.
- 📄 The student's reaction.

Graph the data and review it on a regular basis. Then make adjustments to the program as needed.



## Examples

### Example 1

Ken often spends his time daydreaming and fails to complete assignments before lunch. The other day, the instructor observed Ken in the lunchroom having a great time eating his dessert and talking with friends. So the instructor decided to use a food delay program. Ken's parents agreed and signed the consent form to delay lunch until Ken finishes his work. Now when Ken does NOT finish his assignments, he remains in the classroom and works on them. Then 10 minutes before the lunch period ends, the instructor gives Ken a home-packed lunch to eat in the classroom. However, if Ken completes his work, he may go to the lunchroom to eat and be with his friends for the remaining time.

### Example 2

In class, Brad likes to draw attention to himself by his unkempt and messy behavior. Frequently, he throws papers, pencil shavings, and wrappers on the floor. So the instructor implemented a food delay program. Now when Brad engages in such behavior, his lunch is delayed until he cleans up the mess or until the last 10 minutes of lunch. Also, when he is tidy, the instructor notices and praises him.

## Variations of the Technique

- 👉 **Behavior Contract.** Consider combining a food delay program with a behavioral contract that the student and teacher sign (see *LRBI: Level I—Behavior Contract*). The contract should include the target behavior, reinforcers, criterion, and a bonus or penalty clause. Remember to specify when and how long food will be delayed.
- 👉 **Special Treats.** Special treats can be introduced in the classroom to enhance the procedure. Popcorn parties, Kool-Aide and cookie breaks, and special snack times provide additional motivation.
- 👉 **Earn Part of a Meal.** Students can earn parts of their meal if they take steps toward completing a behavior. For example, Maggie gets three bites of a hot dog when she finishes three math problems.

## Potential Problems and Solutions

### Students Cannot Be Denied a Complete Meal

Students have the right to a scheduled meal. They cannot be completely denied a meal. If the student continues unsuccessfully with the target behavior, then food must be served and another technique considered.

### Aggression or Increased Misbehavior

Misbehavior or aggression may increase when a student's meal is delayed. This is a common reaction associated with a punishment procedure and is generally temporary.

### Medical Complications

Medical complications can occur when a student's food is delayed. For example, some medications should be given during a meal. Other concerns include low blood sugar, headaches, or stomach problems. These are rare side effects; however, the parents should be asked these issues when they sign the Informed Consent Form.

## Getting Ready

Determine if delaying food will be perceived as an undesirable consequence to the student. Observe the student during the regular meal time and note whether the student engages in rewarding activities (e.g., talks with friends, appears to enjoy the food, lingers around the cafeteria).

**Materials and Supplies**

- 📄 Informed Consent Form
- 📄 Behavior Contract Form
- 📄 Data sheets for a Food Delay Log
- 📄 A meal or snacks