

ADVICE FOR PARENTS OF FUSSY EATERS

Children often go through phases of refusing to eat particular foods. This can be a worrying and upsetting time for parents, and it is therefore reassuring to know that fussy eating is very common and if the correct techniques are used, may only last a few weeks.

A healthy child rarely causes themselves any long term problems if they don't eat enough for a short while. If the problem persists or your child is not growing well, seek advice from a healthcare professional.



WHY?

Fussy eating in children can be for the following reasons:

- Showing a sign of independence
- Demand for attention
- Children can learn from a young age that refusing food is very upsetting for parents, and therefore use food refusal to influence the household
- After an illness or infection

REMEMBER

Patience –
Your child will eventually grow out of this phase

Encouragement –
Praise and acknowledgement are always good motivators



SO...

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Children are all different. The following suggestions might help to relieve some of the stress and tension at mealtimes and reduce fussy eating:

WHAT YOU SHOULD DO

- Keep meal times short – half an hour is enough for most children.
- Have regular meals and try to avoid snacks and drinks too close to meal times. Leave at least 2 hours between snacks and meals.
- Eat the same meals at the same time as your children. Remember children learn from you – let them see you eat and enjoy a wide variety of foods.
- Ensure main meals involve sitting at a table.
- Make meal times fun and sociable. This can be a time to discuss events that have happened during the day.
- Involve children in meal selection, preparation and cooking.
- Offer small colourful portions at meal times. If these are finished more can be offered.
- Avoid distractions such as television, music and toys. Meals should be calm and relaxing.
- If your child refuses a food at first, leave it a few days and try again – it may take 17–20 times before new food is accepted.
- Offer a new food with a familiar food or in a different way e.g. chopped, mashed, roasted.

WHAT YOU SHOULDN'T DO

- Do not let young children fill up on drinks before a meal. If a child wants a drink before a meal, only offer a small amount and always offer water first.
- Do not let your child drink milk throughout the day. Healthy children between the ages of 1 and 12 need no more than three dairy servings each day. One portion of milk is 100–150ml.
- Never coax, force or bribe a child to eat.
- When a meal is refused, take away the food without making a fuss.
- When offering a new food do not remind your child that they have refused the food in the past.
- Never offer alternative food or drinks; if a meal is refused this may be seen as a reward and therefore prolong the food refusal.
- Do not try to hide refused food in another familiar food. This may lead the toddler to refuse the familiar food as well.

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Fussy Eater- Top Tips



- Routine:

Stick to a routine with three meals a day: breakfast, lunch and tea, with healthy snacks mid-morning and midafternoon.



- Don't give up!

If your child will eat only a few foods, build on these. For instance if they like potato, try different types such as mash and roast potatoes. If they reject something they previously enjoyed, don't worry. Introduce it again later.



- Patience:

Try to keep your cool even if a meal hasn't been eaten. If you are anxious and tense, your child will pick up on this and it could make the situation worse. So don't make a fuss – just take the plate away without comment



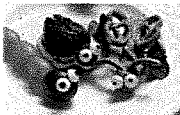
- Rewards (not bribes!) can be motivational:

Reward schemes like a sticker chart in the kitchen can work well with older children. Make the chart yourself together. Give your child a sticker for eating new foods. When they have collected a few stickers, reward them.



- Get your fussy eater involved with cooking:

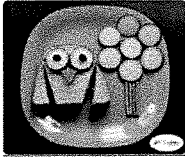
Most children adore cooking and tasks like squeezing fresh orange juice or cracking eggs are well within the capabilities of a young child. It's amazing how being involved in the planning and preparation of a meal can stimulate a child's appetite



- Keep healthy snacks to hand:

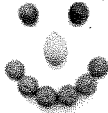
If your child refuses to eat anything other than junk food, don't worry. They will soon find there's not much point making a fuss if you don't react. Avoid empty calorie snacks like crisps or soft

drinks and keep a supply of healthy snacks on hand – maybe have a low shelf in the fridge with cut up fresh fruit and other healthy foods. When little ones are hungry, they won't wait.



- Make food fun and appetising:

Without going to unnecessary lengths, try to make your child's food not only taste good but look good too. Make mini portions in ramekins, chicken skewers or thread bite sized pieces of fruit onto a straw. Salad lollipops are a great way to try lots of different foods and textures in one go.



- Learn where food comes from:

Help children understand where the food they eat comes from by learning about plants, farming and fishing can be a great way to get your fussy eater excited about food. A day out to a local farm, a story book or tv show or growing some plants yourself can all help change your child's perspective of food. Growing your own food doesn't require a huge garden or lots of equipment, get your kids growing their own herbs or sprouting seeds in little pots on window sills. Growing cress in an egg shell is a simple, cheap and quick way to take your little one from planting to eating.



- Eat together to show your fussy eater how good the food is!

Eating together and sharing the same or parts of the same, meal can create a really positive atmosphere all around. When they see their family enjoying their meals, it can be enough inspiration for them to give it a go themselves!



- Sneak some veggies in when they're not looking!

If you're worried that your fussy eater isn't getting enough nutrients then you can always sneak them in to their food!

