Is your child a fussy eater?

Information for parents and carers

This leaflet gives parents and carers information about fussy eaters.

It is normal for toddlers to go through a phase of refusing some foods, particularly during their second year. This is a survival mechanism humans have learned to prevent them eating anything unfamiliar that may be harmful.

Usually, most children will start to eat a wide range of foods again without additional intervention. However, a small group will continue to refuse to try new foods and foods they have previously eaten.

If this describes your child, there are some things to think about:

- The amount of milk your child drinks. Milk is filling and your child may use it as a substitute for food.

- Look at what your child eats during the day. Try to avoid ‘grazing’. Aim to have 3 meals a day, with 2 – 3 snacks.

- If your child is constipated, they may feel too uncomfortable to eat. Seek medical advice from a professional.

Remember, if your child has energy and is continuing to grow, try not to be too concerned.

Managing mealtimes
It is important that mealtimes remain calm and happy times for families. Parents can help by:
• Involving children in food shopping and meal preparation.

• Having regular mealtimes together.

• Showing enjoyment of new foods.

• Having foods in serving dishes – this allows your child to experience new foods without feeling they have to eat them.

**Things that may help**

• Keep giving your child the food they already eat.

• Introduce new foods that are similar to those your child already eats. For example, if your child only eats chicken nuggets, try chicken burgers.

• Your child will need at least 10 – 20 attempts with a new food before they begin to accept it.

• Some children accept new food if the food is separated by using a plate that has different sections.

• Reduce portion size so your child achieves success and might want more.

• Paying attention to signs that your child has had enough to eat.

• Praising good eating behaviours.

• Using small (non-food based) rewards for eating, for example stickers.
• Ignore or divert inappropriate eating behaviours.

• Limiting the length of mealtimes.

• Recognising when your child is getting stressed and taking action to help them stay calm.

Next steps

• To move on from pureed food, try snacks that melt in the mouth, for example Wotsits, chocolate, sponge, prawn crackers.

• Try new foods away from a mealtime in a fun way, for example a picnic or tea party. Introduce them gradually.

• Your child may copy other children in eating new things.

Sensory issues
Children who continue to refuse new foods may have increased sensitivity to different textures within their mouth.

They can also be reluctant to feel new textures with their hands.

Parents can help by:

• Encouraging messy play with your child, for example finger paints, play dough, gluing, sand and water play.
• Playing games with food. Start with dry foods such as uncooked pasta, lentils, bread sticks. Move onto wet foods such as 'squirty' cream, ketchup, jelly, cooked pasta.

• To move from feeling to eating new foods; at first try touching, then smelling, then licking and then biting. Each of these stages can take time. Repeat this often.

• Children are more likely to try a new food if they have the option of not swallowing. You can show them how to spit it out into a tissue for the first few tries.

• Once they are able to swallow a piece of new food, build up how much they eat of it very slowly.

• Try to avoid wiping your child's mouth between mouthfuls. Keep this for the end of the meal.

If you have tried all of the above suggestions over a period of time and you don’t feel that you are making any progress, speak to a health professional, such as a health visitor or GP.

Further sources of information:

Infant and Toddler Forum – [www.infantandtoddlerforum.org](http://www.infantandtoddlerforum.org)

British Dietetic Association – [www.bda.uk.com](http://www.bda.uk.com)

[www.child-nutrition.co.uk/toddlers_refusing_food.html](http://www.child-nutrition.co.uk/toddlers_refusing_food.html)

[http://parentchannel.tv/video/ten-steps-healthy-toddlers](http://parentchannel.tv/video/ten-steps-healthy-toddlers)

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