

Fussy Eating

Advice for Parents
and Carers.



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This pack has been designed to support both families and Health Care Professionals in the management of children's fussy eating. It provides simple to follow tips and suggestions which can help improve the variety in a child's diet. An information sheet, to reassure that fussy eating can be a normal part of a child's development, is also included.

Fussy Eaters - Introduction

Some children and toddlers will go through a stage where they are fussier about food. This tends to start at around two years and should gradually improve as they get older. Fussiness can be a way for your child to show independence - this is a normal part of growing up. Research has shown that fussy toddlers consistently grow up with a healthy weight and height. Good growth is the best indicator of your child getting the appropriate nutrition. If they have enough energy for growth and play then there should be no cause for concern.

It is often helpful to think about what your child has had to eat over a week rather than focusing on a day or single meal. Activity levels vary throughout the week and will have an impact on how hungry your child is. If your child is eating something from each of the four main food groups - Carbohydrates (potatoes, bread, rice, pasta), Fruit and Vegetables, Proteins (beans, pulses, fish, eggs, meats) and Milk and Dairy - there is no need to worry. If your child has a limited dietary intake it is recommended that you purchase an over the counter multi-vitamin tablet. This will help ensure they are meeting their micronutrient requirements.

This pack includes some helpful tips and tricks for managing fussy eating along with a food diary and action plan to help you monitor how much of each food group your child eats and keep track of your goals. Please follow the advice in this pack and for further information on healthy eating have a look on:

- **NHS Choices**
- **First Steps Nutrition (www.firststepsnutrition.org)**
- **The Caroline Walker Trust (www.cwt.org.uk)**

The majority of children with fussy eating will not need input from a Dietitian and / or a Speech and Language Therapist but if you have further concerns, please discuss these with your Health Visitor or GP.



Tips and Tricks

All of the strategies below work best when they are tried together. It is also important to remember that improvement in eating behaviours will take time.

Beginning to Offer New Foods

- Begin with only one or two new foods a day.
- Remember it can take up to 20 tastes before the food is accepted.
- Every child will have foods they like and dislike - this is okay!
- Encourage independent eating by giving finger foods or by giving your child a spoon to hold as you feed them. When they are ready, introduce their own small cutlery.
- Offer small amounts of new foods on a separate plate at the same time as accepted foods. This helps the meal to appear familiar.
- Provide choice - let them choose the flavour, filling or amount.
- Try not to react if your child refuses to eat - simply remove the plate without comment.

Mealtime Advice

- Sit together, this helps to make the meal more about family and less about food.
- Encourage your child to sit down during meals.
- Opportunities to eat will help increase appetite. Aim to have Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner with two snacks in-between.
- Remember it is important to leave around 2 hours between foods to allow your child to become hungry.
- Timing of meals is important - make sure your child is not too tired or too hungry.
- Avoid any distractions when eating - no toys, iPads, TV etc.
- Make sure portion sizes are not too large as children have small stomachs and they become full quickly.
- Set a reasonable time limit for meals (20-30mins is enough), after this remove the food that is left.

Sensory Advice

- Every child processes sensory information differently and it is important to remember this when offering new foods.
- Encouraging sensory/messy play can help desensitise your child to the smell and texture of foods and can help remove anxieties around food.
- When you know which texture, smell or temperature of food your child prefers you will be able to give more foods they will tolerate.
- Try cooling meals to room temperature if your child dislikes foods which are too hot. Cooler foods have less aroma which may help the child who is sensitive to smells.
- Try breaking down meals into separate parts - for macaroni cheese offer a piece of plain pasta alongside a bit of cheese sauce.

Food Relationships

- Praise your child when they try anything new around mealtimes, such as pouring drinks or preparing foods rather than commenting on their eating.
- Give your child the opportunity to look at, talk about, feel, smell new foods without the pressure to eat.
- This doesn't just have to be at mealtimes, for example, involve your child in shopping and cooking as well.
- Encouraging your child to taste new foods as part of a game rather than at a mealtime can help reduce stress at mealtimes.
- Avoid showing negative reactions when your child isn't keen to try new foods.
- Don't pressure to try the new food as this may lead to unhealthy relationships with food.

Drinks

- In general, children need 6-8 drinks of approximately 150ml per day to make sure they are getting enough fluid. Any more than this amount can have an impact on the level of food intake.
- Drinks can be nutritious but they do not help your child develop their chewing and biting skills. Try offering meals before milk and other fluids.

There are a lot of tips above, try selecting two or three of the suggestions above to work on. The action plan on the next page can help you keep track!

Goals	Achieved
1.	
2.	
3.	

Food and Fluid Diary

Keeping a note of the foods and drinks your child is having during the week can help reassure you that they are eating more than you think! **Try using the table below.**

Time	Food and Fluid Consumed	Mealtime Behaviours

Food and Fluid Diary

Time	Food and Fluid Consumed	Mealtime Behaviours

Food and Fluid Diary

Time	Food and Fluid Consumed	Mealtime Behaviours

Assessment Advice for Health Visitors

Research has found that parental anxiety can be a contributing factor to fussy eating. A recent study showed that 50% of three year olds with concerned parents were picky compared to only 17% when the parents were more relaxed. Exposure to a variety of foods and textures during the weaning stage helps with the acceptance of foods as the child grows. Fussiness can also be related to certain medical conditions such as Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) due to sensory issues, side effects of medications and reluctance to sit for meals.

As well as the suggestions above, the following techniques can be helpful for families who continue to have issues:

- **Encourage children to place a small amount of the new food onto their molars (or dinosaur teeth) at the side as they are less sensitive to taste than the tongue. This can decrease the risk of gagging or food being spat out if the taste is disliked.**
- **Suggest using a straw as it helps food to move to the back of the mouth to be swallowed as well as clearing the mouth of the taste.**
- **Try the “touch to taste” method.**
 - 1. Start by placing the new food on a separate plate. Encourage the child to touch and play with the food without any pressure or suggestion to taste it.**
 - 2. Continue with this step until the child is happy to play with the food - the aim is for the food to become familiar.**
 - 3. Next, encourage the child to try placing a small bit of the food on their lips - again no pressure to eat. Continue until they are happy to do so.**
 - 4. Move onto placing a small amount of food on the dinosaur teeth - it is okay if the child spits / takes the food out.**
 - 5. The aim is to build on the above step until the child is happy to swallow the food.**



Relevant Contact Numbers

Dietetics

Community Dietetics
Royal Aberdeen Childrens Hospital
Moray Dietetics

0345 0990 200
01224 552630
01343 567350

Speech and Language Therapy

Royal Aberdeen Childrens Hospital
Moray Speech and Language Therapy

01224 554628
01343 553100





Assessment Questions

General	Comments
Weight	
Length / Height	
Any Growth Concerns?	
Are vitamin supplements given?	
If yes, which kind?	
Are there issues with constipation?	
Is there a family history of eating problems?	
Feeding History	Comments
When were solids started?	
Any issues with fussiness during weaning?	
When did issues with fussiness begin?	



Current Meal Pattern**Breakfast:****Snack:****Lunch:****Snack:****Dinner:****Snack:**

Points to Consider

Are there any of the main food groups missed?

Does the child have a regular meal pattern?

How often are drinks offered?

What are fluids consumed from?

When are drinks offered?

How often are snacks offered?

Are portion sizes appropriate?

Where and in what position does the child eat their meals?

Are there distractions?

Parents' reactions to food refusal?

How does the child eat at playgroup/nursery?

Is there a preference for taste, texture or temperature?

Does the child prefer to eat finger foods or use certain utensils?

Who feeds the child?



Action Plan

There are a lot of tips on page 2, try selecting two or three of the suggestions to work on. The action plan below can help you keep track!

Discuss how the parents will achieve these goals.

1.

2.

3.



Further information for Health Visitors

Growth and body composition in children who are picky eaters: A longitudinal view by Caroline M Taylor, Colin D Steer, Nicholas P Hays and Pauline M Emmett in the European Journal of Clinical Nutrition.

Fussy Eating in Toddlers and Young Children: By Paula Hallam, Registered Dietitian, Great Ormond Street Hospital in the Network Health Digest December 2016 / January 2017.

How to Manage Fussy Eating in Toddlers: By Dr Gill Harris, Child and Clinical Psychologist, University of Birmingham in the Network Health Digest July 2018.







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