Fussy eating

how can I help my child?
Fussy eating

Fussy eating is very common and most children will go through a phase of it as they grow up. It can often occur during the transition from soft to lumpy foods. Sometimes it occurs when children reach the “terrible two’s” and can be seen as part of normal development.

In this phase of development children seek to test the limits and strive for independence. Often children grow out of fussy eating, particularly when they start school.

However, this leaflet contains some simple advice which may help improve mealtimes for you and your family.

**Here are some suggestions about how to conduct mealtimes...**

- The most important thing you can do is to be calm and consistent as possible at mealtimes, we know that this is easier said than done, but it really does help. Don’t worry too much about the combination of foods – remember breakfast cereal doesn’t always need to be kept for breakfast!

- Meal times should be fun and relaxed, but with sufficient rules and structure to help your child learn appropriate behaviour.

- Give plenty of encouragement to your child when they are eating, even when they only eat a little bit, and ignore any unwanted behaviour – children soon learn that good behaviour is a much better way of getting your attention.

- Meal times should be eaten without distractions such as television. Ideally all meals should be eaten at the table. This will help the child associate the table with meals, whereas the lounge is associated with the television.

- Eat meals with the rest of the family. Children will copy parents, siblings and peers. Often children will eat well at school or nursery, but refuse meals at home.

- A good example should be set at home, with lots of encouragement and the same rules for all the family!
What can I do?

give your child plenty of motivation to eat, they will be more motivated if they get lots of encouragement from you, if they are old enough you can talk to them about how important food is to help us grow strong.

a scrapbook recording new foods eaten can be very rewarding to a child, perhaps they could receive a reward when they fill a page.

some children have developed a genuine fear of food, give them plenty of reassurance, comfort and encouragement to tackle their fears.

It is sometimes useful to consider your own reactions...

many parents worry that other people may criticise them, feeding problems occur for a variety of reasons, it is never one person’s fault.

often parents worry about other children in the family copying fussy eater behaviour, this does not always happen, but by rewarding good eating behaviour and ignoring unwanted behaviour you can ensure that other children in the family develop good habits.

check that your expectations of your child are appropriate, ask other parents of children of a similar age, what their children are like.

Things may get worse before they get better, but try to persevere, it will be worth it in the end.

Be patient ... even though this is not always easy!
Tempting tasty tips...

Mini Pitta Bread  stuffed with chopped egg or tuna and sweetcorn or ham and tomato

Baked Beans on Toast
This can be a great meal. Try to encourage beans rather than spaghetti hoops as the beans will provide much more protein

Mini Pizzas
Use a muffin split in two. Spread each muffin slice with a little tomato puree, add some chopped ham or chicken, a favourite vegetable such as sweetcorn, top with grated cheese and grill

Cheese Stars on Toast
Grill cheddar cheese on toast then use a novelty shaped scone cutter to cut shapes out of the toast

Fish Fingers
Grill fish fingers. Serve with peas and mashed potato

Cheesy Omlette
Beat two eggs with a little milk and some grated cheese. Allow to almost set in a frying pan and encourage your child to add favourite vegetables e.g. tomato

Old Fashioned Favourite
Add carrots and sweetcorn to a basic mince and gravy mixture. Serve with mashed potato
More tasty ideas...

Bread ‘Soldiers’
spread with cheese spread or meat paste

Home-made Milkshakes
1/2 pint milk
1/2 banana or 3/4 berries
2 teaspoons of milkshake powder.
Mix all together in blender

Fruit Ice Lollies
Puree fresh fruit eg. strawberries, kiwi fruit, peaches, and layer each puree into an ice lolly block to build a ‘traffic light’. Freeze until firm (about 1 hour)

Fruit Segments or Slices
eg. satsumas, kiwi fruit, pineapple peach or plum

Small Pot of Yoghurt or Fromage Frais
choose your child’s favourite flavour and the lower sugar option

Crumpets
topped with grated cheese and grilled

Cereal
small bowl of breakfast cereal with milk
try adding some chopped banana

Cheese cubes
Help... my child won't eat!

- always offer the same food as the other family members and peers wherever possible. It is important not to offer alternative meals, snacks, puddings or favourite drinks (such as milkshakes) if the meal is refused as this can be seen as rewarding your child for poor feeding behaviour.

- give clear instructions about what to eat and follow through any consequences you set; for example, your child can have a favourite pudding only if the agreed amount of the main meal has been eaten.

- start by offering food you know your child will eat and gradually increase the variety.

- ensure meals look attractive and the plate is not piled high with food as this may appear threatening to your child.

- allow your child to get messy and explore different foods by trying two or three alternatives, this helps them feel in control.

- don't try to trick your child, or force feed them, they need to trust you.

- ignore bad behaviour such as throwing food, but calmly replace the food until it is eaten.

- offer small, regular meals and limit the time taken to about 20 minutes, clear away any uneaten food at the end of this time without commenting on it.

- do not give your child too many drinks or snacks as this can fill them up, offer drinks after they have eaten some food rather than directly before mealtimes (you may wish to ask your health visitor for advice on how much your child should drink).
What about my older children?

Fussy eating is usually seen in toddlers and smaller children but that does not mean older children never have fussy phases!

Starting school can often lead to issues with food. Your child is suddenly open to more influences and peer pressure. You may find that favourite foods are suddenly not so favourite!

Try the following ideas to help...

Chat to other parents and all agree to put a piece of fruit in the lunchboxes on the same day. If your child and his/her friends all have apples or yoghurt on the same day they may be more likely to eat it. Why not all agree to choose a none crisp or none chocolate day in the week?

Packing a lunch that is both healthy and acceptable to your child is not always easy. Why not try the following ideas and remember to pack lunches in a suitable box with a cool pack.

- Cheese Spread & Salad Bagel
- Yoghurt
- Packet of Raisins
- Fruit Juice

- Grated Cheese & Pickle Pitta
- Breadsticks
- Fruit Bun
- Fruit Juice
- Pear

- Corned Beef & Salad Crustly Roll
- Fromage Frais
- Apple
- Fruit Juice
- Flapjack

- Try to include each of the following in the lunchbox daily...
  - a drink of water, milk or fruit juice
  - a piece of fruit
  - a good portion of starchy food such as bread or a roll
  - some salad in the sandwiches or roll or chopped vegetables as a side dish

- Egg & Cress Roll
- Carton of Fresh Fruit Juice
- Carrot & Apple Sticks
- Fromage Frais
- Muesli Bar