

# 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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