

## What's the Issue?

It can be said that nearly every family will have moments when their child is being fussy about food. Rest assured however that fussy eating is thought to be a natural behaviour and a part of the developmental process (typically affecting between 10% and 20% of children under five).

Many parents find that their child will become more fussy from around the age of two, which is not surprising as many two year olds are quite determined little people, striving to become independent.

It's perfectly normal for toddlers to refuse to eat or even taste new foods, so try not to worry unless your child is not putting on weight as quickly as they should (or is obviously ill). Children will usually eat enough to keep themselves going.

### Food is Love ...

One of the reasons that mealtimes can be tricky is because they can quickly become packed full of emotion. Most parents are primed to ensure the survival of their children and as part of this package, to nourish them.



Emotions can easily run high when a child refuses to try food or appears not to have eaten enough. This, in turn, can lead to situations when parents offer alternative foods that they know the child will eat, or to force the child to eat up. Of course, neither of these situations is helpful in the longer term. The former means that some children eat only a restricted range of foods, while the latter means that children associate food and mealtimes with stress.

## What Do I Do?

### Remain Calm ...

Battles at mealtimes only make the situation worse and the tension can make some children fearful and thus more resistant to eating. In worst cases, children see that they can reduce their parents to bribery or tears and it goes without saying that such control is not healthy for young children.

### Portion Policing ...

A spin-off from the high emotion linked to food is a misconception around how much young children should actually be eating. Seeing how much (or just how little) young children actually need can come as a real surprise for some parents.



As we currently live in an age where child obesity is a huge concern, there are plenty of resources around to help guide parents. Of particular note are the pictorial resources available from the Children's Food Trust and also the Caroline Walker Trust that 'show' how much food children need (see [www.childrensfoodtrust.org.uk](http://www.childrensfoodtrust.org.uk) and [www.cwt.org.uk](http://www.cwt.org.uk)).

While some 'fussy' eating can be cured by simply putting less on a plate, it can make mealtimes a battle ground for some parents. It's so easy to feel frustrated and powerless when a child simply refuses to eat but the key is not to give in, or give up!

## Tricks of the Trade ...

Here are some tricks of the trade we can share with parents which might work:

- Encourage children in the preparation of food - being involved in the planning and preparation can stimulate a child's willingness to try new things.
- Don't leave meals until your child is too hungry or tired to eat.
- Give small portions and praise your child for eating, even if they only manage a little.
- Routine is important. Set specific times for meals and healthy snacks and stick to it. Children like familiarity.
- Make mealtimes more fun and interesting. Cut sandwiches into different shapes; sit down and have a chat about other things - focusing on the food is rarely a good tactic
- If your child rejects the food, take it away without comment and try to remain calm! The way we deal with the situation impacts on children's eating habits and they will soon find there's not much point making a fuss if you don't react.
- Don't give too many between meal snacks and try to keep them 'healthy'. If children get too used to crisps or biscuits they will find 'real food' less appealing.
- If your child fills up with juice or squash between meals and refuses meals, try gradually reducing the amount of juice or squash they have.
- Persist with new foods, recipes and creative ways to hide the 'good bits' i.e. in smoothies and sauces.
- Know of other children the same age who are good eaters? Why not ask them to tea! A good example can work wonders.

## In Summary ...

- Have a routine and stick to it!
- Limit snacks and squash between meals
- Keep snacks 'healthy'
- Make mealtimes more interesting and fun
- Involve your child in food preparation
- Small portions
- Lots of encouragement



### ... And most importantly

- **Always remain calm!**

In summary, as long as your child eats some food from each of the four food groups:

Starchy Foods - bread, rice, potato and pasta

Fruit and Vegetables

Meat, fish, eggs, beans and non-dairy proteins

Milk and dairy foods

... even if it's always the same old favourites you should not need to worry!

Gradually introduce other food choices or go back to the foods your child did not like before and try them again. Remember, as long as your child is active and gaining weight, they are getting enough to eat, even if it doesn't look like it to you!

Finally, for families entrenched in meal warfare it can be worth changing the script! Instead of eating in the same place, at the same time and having the same battles, set up a new situation! How about a teddy bears picnic on the carpet? Changing the way you react or what you normally do and say can make quite a difference as it gives everyone a 'fresh start'.

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### Information Sources:

#### Nursery World

A Parent's Guide to Fussy Eaters

Mealtimes – Chew it Over

To the Point – Phased by Fussiness

#### Children's Food Trust

Voluntary Food and Drink Guidelines



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Parents' Guide to ...

# Fussy Eating

How do you deal with  
Fussy Eating?

