

What is fussy eating?

Fussy eating is characterised by a reluctance to eat unfamiliar and/or familiar foods.

It's a normal stage of development!

Many children go through phases of displaying fussy eating habits. If your child is active, gaining weight, and appears well, they are likely consuming enough food to maintain good health.

An evolutionary explanation: Fussy eating was a survival strategy for our ancestors, serving as a protective mechanism that prevented children eating potentially harmful foods, such as wild poisonous mushrooms or berries.

Don't give up! Some foods may take multiple exposures for a child to accept the smell, look, texture, and taste. It is important to stay patient if your child refuses a food and continue to gradually reintroduce that food into their diet.

How can we help?

Although fussy eating may be concerning for parents, it often resolves naturally over time and can be assisted with simple strategies outlined in this leaflet.

When to seek further help

If you have any concerns regarding the following issues, consider reaching out to a healthcare professional, such as your general practitioner (GP), health visitor or school nurse:

- Weight loss or a drop in centiles on the growth charts.
- Your child is weak, lethargic, irritable, or feverish.
- Coughing or choking while eating.
- Frequent chest infections.

Seeking professional advice could help rule out any potential underlying causes.

TIPS FOR PARENTS

Role-modelling

- Show how you enjoy eating the foods you offer.
- Talk about how food tastes, colour, temperature and where it comes from.
- Talk about the rewards of eating foods e.g "I love bananas, they give me energy!"
- Use neutral language, not labelling foods as good' or 'bad'. Embrace all foods as part of a healthy, balanced diet.

A child can be exposed to a new food around 15-20 times before they can decide if they like it!

Introduce one unfamiliar food at a time. Fill the rest of the plate with familiar, safe foods.

Pressure to eat and finish the plate can have negative health outcomes. Your child will learn to self-regulate feelings of fullness without these pressures.



Positive mealtime environment

- Eat together
- Eat the same foods – children from ages 2 and above can eat most of the same foods as the rest of the family.
- Ensure a calm environment
- Limit distractions then the child can focus on feelings of fullness and hunger cues.
- Use a timer for wriggly children, build up the time required to stay at the table, however if your child states they are full, let them leave the meal.

Read your food!

Research has shown that visual exposure and familiarity of fruits and vegetables through reading about them, increases a child's preferences for those foods!

5 Fun Ways to Increase Food Acceptance

Get Creative in the Kitchen

Involve your little ones in cooking. When kids participate in meal preparation, they are more likely to try what they've created. It's a fun way to bond and spark their interest in food. See ideas on back page!

Grow Together

Consider growing a small vegetable or herb garden together. Kids love watching things grow and are more likely to try foods they've cultivated themselves.

Plate Masterpieces

Transform plates into canvases. Encourage kids to create art with their food. Use colourful fruits, veggies, and sauces to craft edible masterpieces. The more creative, the better!

Theme Nights

Designate certain nights as theme nights. Explore different cultures by creating meals inspired by their cuisines. Dress up or decorate the dining area to match the theme, making it a memorable experience.

Have a Picnic

Lay out a blanket in a park, pack a bag with a variety of finger foods and enjoy a picnic. Eating in a novel location can alleviate the pressures associated with the dinner table, fostering a relaxed and enjoyable setting that encourages children to be more open to trying new foods.

Maintaining Adequate Nutrition & Growth

The following tips can help to maintain healthy nutrition and growth:

Balanced diet

- Include a rainbow of colours on your child's plate
- Ensure a variety of fruits, vegetables, protein, dairy and wholegrain carbohydrates

Hydration

- Encourage regular consumption of water throughout the day

Portion control

- Remember that your child's tummy is smaller than you think! Using the child's palm as a guide for portioning food items can be useful and this adapts in line with their growth. For further information see NHS CHange4Life portion size guide.

Multivitamin

- All children aged 6 months to 4 years should take an age-appropriate multivitamin

Healthy snacking

- Offer nutrient dense foods for snacks such as carrots and hummus or fruit and yoghurt
- Limit snacks before main meals to prevent being overly full

o Foody

Parents and
Healthy Kids

Fussy T

Empowering
Nurturing

Tiny Chef Ideas

These cooking activities can be a great way to increase food acceptance:

- Build your own pizzas!
- Fruit and veg smoothies
- Fruit ice lollies
- Adding fruit and veg into homemade cakes and bakes like blueberry muffins
- Vegetable 'monster' kebabs
- Food art – create a scene on the plate!
- Mini omelette with added veg