

FUSSY EATERS

HELPING YOUR CHILDREN TO TRY NEW FOODS

STAY CALM

We're all guilty of losing our patience from time to time when we become frustrated over our children's refusal to eat. But it's really important that we try to stay calm and not increase your child's anxiety and emotion around food.

It's perfectly normal for children to refuse to eat or try new foods sometimes. It's natural for us to worry whether they are getting enough food or the right food but try not to worry too much. If your child is active and healthy they are getting enough to eat. However it is important to have a varied and balanced diet and there are some ways you can help to encourage them to eat a wider range of foods.

TOP TIPS

- Only introduce one food at a time
- Don't leave meals until your child is too hungry or too tired
- Give children options
- Get them involved in the preparation
- Be a role model
- Don't give them too many snacks
- Don't use food as a reward or punishment
- Don't label food as 'good' or 'bad'

HOW TO ENCOURAGE YOUR CHILD TO TRY NEW FOODS

- Only introduce one new food at a time. You don't want to overwhelm the child and potentially increase any anxiety they have around new foods. Add just a small amount to their plate alongside lots of foods that they know and love.
- With very fussy children, your goal when first introducing a child to a new food may not be to get them to eat it. It's ok that to start with you just get them to accept that food on their plate. If they remove it the first couple of times, that's ok too. It's all part of the process. Let them smell it and touch it, building up to tasting it in their own time. Be patient. If your child rejects the food, do not force them to eat it. Just take the food away without saying anything or making a fuss about it. Try the food again another time.
- Let them know that's it ok if they don't like it. After one bite they can put the food down and leave it there. Once they have tried it but told you that they don't want to try anymore, don't force them to try it again. It's important that they feel like they are not being forced to eat it. Praise your child for eating what they tried, even if they only ate a little.
- Choose a time of the day or even day of the week when they are alert and relaxed and not tired. Evening time isn't always the best time start trying new foods so choose a time earlier in the day when they are more likely to engage with the process. This can be difficult if they are

in school all day so instead do it at the weekend. Do not leave meals until your child is too hungry or tired to eat.

- Children like to feel that they are in control over what they are eating and this is especially true with fussy eaters. Giving children options is a great way to encourage them. For example, if you want them to try broccoli give them three different ways that you can serve it up. Let them choose how they try that food. Changing how you serve a food may make it more appealing. Your child might refuse cooked carrots but enjoy raw or grated carrot. They may prefer to try a new fruit in a smoothie before trying it on its own. Give your child the same food as the rest of the family but give them some input into what that meal is. You may try putting a selection of food in the middle of the table for them to pick the bits they want. Choosing to put it on their plate themselves can motivate them to eat it.
- Getting children involved in the preparation of meals you want them to eat can be really beneficial. Even if they don't want to try that food and refuse to taste it, getting them peeling, chopping, cooking etc. will help to make them more comfortable around foods. However you will often find that when children prepare food they are more likely to try it.
- The best way for your child to learn to eat and enjoy new foods is to copy you. Be a role model and eat plenty of the foods you are asking them to try yourself. Try to eat with them as often as you can. Make mealtimes enjoyable and not just about eating. Sit down and chat about other things. If you know any other children of the same age who are good eaters, ask them round for tea. But do not talk too much about how good the other children are. If your child is a slow eater be patient, although it can be frustrating, make meal times a calm, social time that you all can enjoy being part of.
- Do not give your child too many snacks between meals. Two healthy snacks a day is plenty. Try to limit the amount of high sugar food you buy and have whole food snacks like fruit and vegetable available. Although you shouldn't force your child to eat any particular food the options should be varied and nutritious.
- Do not to use food as a reward or a punishment. This can lead to further issues around food and your child may start to think of sweets as nice and vegetables as nasty.
- It's best not to label food as 'good' and 'bad', encourage them to try the new food because its tasty not just because it's good for them. It can be easy for children to build the association that nutritious food doesn't taste as good and you only eat it because it's healthy. This instantly puts a barrier up for trying new foods. Teach them how different foods can help your body grow and work in different ways. However, focusing on labels like healthy and unhealthy can be unhelpful.

USEFUL WEBSITES

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/baby/weaning-and-feeding/fussy-eaters/>

<https://www.gosh.nhs.uk/conditions-and-treatments/general-health-advice/food-and-diet/fussy-eaters/>

<https://www.jamieoliver.com/features/fussy-eaters-jamies-top-tips-tricks/>

<https://www.familylives.org.uk/advice/early-years-development/health-and-development/coping-with-fussy-eaters?referer=/advice/early-years-development>

<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/food-guidelines-and-food-labels/the-eatwell-guide/>