

Fussy eating self-help guide

Many children can be selective about their eating. Even when they only eat a narrow range of foods, these may provide a range of nutrients which means any nutritional deficiencies will be avoided. Although this can be worrying for yourself as a parent, fussy eating often resolves with time and can be helped by some simple mealtime strategies.

This self-help guide has been developed by the paediatric Dietitian's at East Lancashire Hospitals NHS Trust to provide parents with accessible tools and resources from their home's. Here, you can find resources on feeding techniques and information related to concerns you may have whilst your baby is weaning and being introduced to new foods.

What is Fussy Eating?

Fussy eaters have a reduced range of foods that they eat but usually have around 30 foods in their diet. They will eat more than 1 food from each food group. They will usually eat with the family but frequently eat different foods than the family. They can tolerate new foods on their plate, can touch or taste them. New foods may need to be offered between 15-25 before they are accepted.

What is Problem feeding?

Problem Feeders have a more restricted diet that consists of less than 20 foods. Foods 'lost' are not re-gained. These children may 'fall apart' with new foods and tend to refuse entire categories of food. They usually eat different food than the family and often eat alone. New foods take more than 25 offers to be accepted.

SOCIAL MODELLING – these steps will help you child accept new foods more readily.

- Family meal – sit & eat with your child. Make a 'no sitting – no food' rule. This will give your child structure and routines at mealtimes. But remember set realistic goals for sitting e.g. 5 minutes. Try using a timer and give plenty of praise!
- Try using a child-size chair and table – this may make it easier for your child to focus on eating if they feel more stable.
- Model good feeding behaviours – eat with a knife and fork, sit at the table
- Discuss the foods being served – what it is/look/smell/taste etc. Try to serve foods in dishes in the middle of the table allowing each family member to help

themselves. Many children accept food more readily when they can take the food on their terms.

- Exaggerate eating motions (even eat with your mouth open) so your child sees how you eat
- Shadow your child's eating – eat new food with them
- Make sure the food is fun – presentation is important especially when they are under 5 years old.
- The child is not to be the focus – focus on the food/positive topics If you have something that helps manage your child's behaviours in other areas try using this at mealtimes e.g. rewards or distractions such as favourite TV shows or music. (ignore unwanted behaviour, praise good behaviour)
- Do not punish children at meals – Don't yell/nag
- Child need to stay at the table – no 'time out' during meal
- Some children will try foods from their parent's plate rather than their own. Encourage this – it's not wrong! Give some of the food on their own plate as well – your child may then try this too.
- Focus on one behaviour at a time e.g., when your child is trying a new food, ignore poor table manners.

AVOID stress = stress releases adrenaline = Fight & Flight = anxiety & stomach problems

Additional Information about mealtime Structure

- Use same place, table &/or designated surface for each meal & snack – buy new plain plastic placemats as cue to eating
- Offer 1 preferred food at every meal/snack along with other family foods – (something to eat & something to learn from, serve as 1 meal for everyone)
- Follow a schedule – regular times
- Routine to meals –
 - Warning – "we're going to eat in 5 minutes"
 - Transition – "time to wash your hands"
 - Sit at table with an empty plate
 - Family style serving – talk about what your serving
 - Clean up
- Present foods in manageable bites for your child's skill level (not age) – E.g. thin strips of food the child can easily hold or chewable bites (use a cocktail fork – gets food into correct position in mouth)
- Serving size – appropriate for child (1tbsp per each year of child's age)
- Limit meals to 15-30minutes
- Plan what you and your child are going to do at the end of the meal – use pictures or show the play item

ELHT infant feeding page:

<https://elht.nhs.uk/services/maternity-and-newborn-services/infant-feeding>

British Dietetic Association Complementary feeding (weaning): Food Fact Sheet

<https://www.bda.uk.com/resource/complementary-feeding-weaning.html>

NHS Start for Life safe weaning page:

<https://www.nhs.uk/start4life/weaning/safe-weaning/gagging/>

NHS website - Search for fussy eaters

Infant and toddler forum – search for fussy eaters