

SPEECH AND LANGUAGE THERAPY SERVICES

Patient Information

Fussy Eating



This information leaflet should only be used in conjunction with advice given from your speech and language therapist

FUSSY EATING



Fussy eating is very common and most children will go through a phase of it as they grow up. It can often occur during the transition from soft to lumpy foods. Sometimes it occurs when children reach the 'terrible twos' and can be seen as part of normal development. In this phase of development children grow out of fussy eating, particularly when they start school. However, this leaflet contains some simple advice which may help improve mealtimes for you and your family.

HOW CAN I HELP MY CHILD OVERCOME FUSSY EATING?

Here are some suggestions about how to conduct mealtimes:

- The most important thing you can do is to be as calm and consistent as possible at mealtimes, we know that this is easier said than done, but it really does help.
- Mealtimes should be fun and relaxed, but with sufficient rules and structure to help your child learn appropriate behaviour.
- Give plenty of encouragement to your child when they are eating, even when they only eat a little bit, and ignore any unwanted behaviour – children soon learn that good behaviour is a much better way of getting your attention.
- Don't try to trick your child, or force feed them, they need to trust you.
- Ignore bad behaviour such as throwing food, but calmly replace the food until it is eaten.
- Offer small, regular meals and limit the time taken to about 20 minutes, clear away any uneaten food at the end of this time without commenting on it.



Here are some specific suggestions to do with food:

- Give clear instructions about what to eat and follow through any consequences you set, for example, your child can have a favourite pudding only if the agreed amount of the main meal has been eaten.
- Start by offering food you know your child will eat and gradually increase the variety.
- Allow your child to get messy and explore different foods, try offering your child two or three alternatives, this helps them feel in control.
- Do not give your child too many drinks or snacks as this can fill them up, offer drinks after they have eaten some food rather than directly before mealtimes (you may wish to ask you health visitor for advice on how much your child should drink).

Here are some general ideas:

- Give your child plenty of motivation to eat, they will be more motivated if they get lots of encouragement from you, if they are old enough you can talk to them about how important food is to help us grow strong.
- A scrapbook recording new foods eaten can be very rewarding to a child, perhaps they could receive a reward when they fill a page?
- Some children have developed a genuine fear of food, give them plenty of reassurance, comfort and encouragement to tackle their fears.



It is sometimes useful to consider your own reactions:

- Many parents worry that other people may criticise them, feeding problems occur for a variety of reasons, it is never one person's fault.
- Often parents worry about other children in the family copying fussy eating behaviour, this does not always happen, but by rewarding good eating behaviour and ignoring unwanted behaviour you can ensure that other children in the family develop good habits.
- Check that your expectations of your child are appropriate, check with parents of children of a similar age, what were you like at that age?

Things may get worse before they get better, but try to persevere, it will be worth it in the end.

Does my child need to see a specialist?

Often this is not necessary as most children grow out of fussy eating in their own time, Dieticians, Psychologists, Paediatricians and Speech and Language Therapists sometimes help children with eating problems. You will need to speak with your G.P. about a referral to one of these professionals. Listed below are some examples of when to seek further advice from a specialist:

- ✓ If your child has a medical condition, such as diabetes, cystic fibrosis or a food allergy.
- ✓ If your child has been an extremely fussy eater for more than a year and shows no sign of growing out of it.
- ✓ If your child has a physical problem with eating such as severe and frequent vomiting.

If you have further questions, please ask your Health Visitor or G.P.



Speech and Language Therapy Services Information



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When we are not available, please leave a message on our secure answer phone.

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