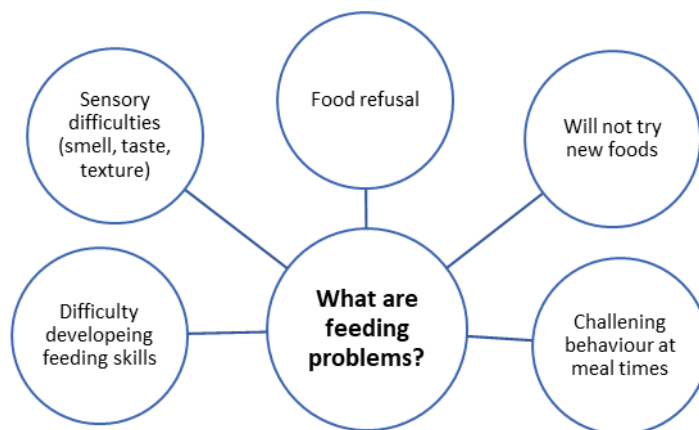




**Milton Keynes Community Occupational Therapy –
Advice for fussy eating - Early years**



Ideas you can try to support your child:

- **Make it fun:** Come away from the table and play with your food! If you want to introduce a new food, do so with a fun play activity that makes approaching the food less scary for the child. Paint pictures with yoghurt working towards finger painting with it. Start with dry food and work towards wetter, stickier foods as these are harder to tolerate.
- **Role model** for your child and let them sit at the table with the whole family when the family has dinner time. Have their learning plate with a small amount of the family’s meal on it and talk about the food positively. Use phrases like “I can twirl my spaghetti around my fork can you?”, “you don’t have to eat it but can you tell me what it smells like?”, “I think it smells yummy!”.
- **No pressure!** Avoid phrases such as: “I want you to eat all of your carrots”, “If you eat everything on your plate then you can leave the table”, “You cannot go outside to play unless you finish your spaghetti”. These practices can cause negative feelings that the child will associate with mealtimes.
- **Keep it short!** Limit each mealtime to 15-30 minutes
- **Check the environment and minimise distractions:** Always make sure your child is well supported in a chair or high chair. Minimise visual and sound distractions by closing the curtains to the nearby window, putting away phones and tablets/ipads, switch off the loud TV in the background.
- **Keep to a meal time routine:** Meal time routines helps the child to prepare for what’s coming. Start with washing hands together and setting out the table settings. Include them in the process of preparing the meal so they know what is going into the food they will be served later.

Problem	Ideas to try
“Are feeding difficulties common?”	Yes! In fact, behaviours such as refusing new foods are a normal stage of a child's development between 18 months and 3 years.
“What is a restricted diet?”	Tolerating less than 20 foods, only taking foods from certain food groups (e.g. only eating carbohydrates), only tolerating foods with particular textures (e.g. only eating dry, crispy foods), reluctant / frightened to try new foods, may or may not be impacting growth.
“My child will only eat food that doesn't touch the other pieces of food in the plate”	Pick your battles! In the end you want your child to eat the food you give them. If this means that you should split them up on the plate to lessen the child anxiety around feeding or tolerating more than one texture then do so!
“my child won't tolerate the new food on their plate”	Try a learning plate. Decorate the plate with the child in their favourite cartoon or colour. This plate will have the new food/the family's meal on it while the child's plate will have the food they are guaranteed to eat. Encourage the child to explore the food on the learning plate at meal times without the pressure to eat it.

Suggested resources:



Learning plate: This is a plate that is fun and motivating to the child to interact with (think favourite colour and cartoon character) to make new foods less intimidating. This plate should be used in conjunction with the dinner plate with the food they are guaranteed to eat. This plate is for exploration during mealtimes where the child will have the food they tolerate on their dinner plate while the food being introduced/family meal will be adjacent to their dinner plate on the learning plate. This will familiarise them with the food in an appropriate setting without the pressure to eat what is on it.



Divider plate: For those children who will only eat food that doesn't touch or only if it is deconstructed. When feeding and eating uses so many sensory processing areas it can be easier for the child to tolerate their meal if the food is divided for them. They might want to divide it by category or texture. Ever heard of “how do you eat an elephant?- One bite at a time”. This plate can present the food in a way that makes the contents look more manageable to eat.