



For The Early Learning Centre Sector

Nutrition Fact Sheet

How To Handle Fussy Eating



Fussy eating is a common behavior in toddlers and young children. It's a phase where children may be selective about what they eat or refuse certain foods. While it can be frustrating for parents, it's typically a normal part of a child's development.

In this fact sheet, we provide guidance on how to handle fussy eating in toddlers and encourage healthy eating habits.

Key Messages -

- Fussy eating is a phase where children may be selective about what they eat and may refuse certain foods.
- Children may have sensitive taste buds and may react to new or unfamiliar foods. They may need time to adjust to new flavours and textures.
- Many factors and strategies can help with fussy eating such as:
 - Meal time environment
 - Types of food offered
 - Food textures
 - Routine
- It's important to keep in mind that it may take several exposures to a new food before a child accepts it.

UNDERSTANDING FUSSY EATING

Normal Development - Fussy eating is often a developmental stage. Toddlers are exploring their independence, and this includes asserting control over what they eat.

Taste Preferences - Children have sensitive taste buds and may react strongly to new or unfamiliar flavours and textures. They may need time to adjust to new foods.

TIPS FOR HANDLING FUSSY EATING

Mealtime Environment -

- **Maintain a Routine** - Establish regular meal and snack times. Predictable routines help children feel secure and encourage them to eat when it's mealtime.
- **Model Healthy Eating** - Children often mimic their parents' eating habits. Be a positive role model by enjoying a variety of healthy foods.



- **Make Meals Enjoyable** - Create a pleasant eating environment. Avoid distractions like screens during meals and encourage positive conversation.

Explore Different Food Options -

- **Offer a Variety of Foods** - Present a wide range of nutritious foods, including fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean proteins, and dairy products. Offer options to cater to different tastes and textures.
- **Avoid Food Battles** - Pressuring a child to eat a particular food can lead to resistance. Instead, offer choices within a balanced meal and let them decide what to eat.
- **Provide Choice** - Where possible, provide children the choice of two food options such as two types of fruit.
- **Finger Foods** - Finger foods can be an alternative way to eat meals and provide more independence and enjoyment.
- **New Foods** - If a child is hesitant to try a new food, offer the new food with a food that they already like.

Other Tips -

- **Involve Children** - Let toddlers help with age-appropriate tasks in the kitchen, such as washing fruit or setting the table. Involvement can increase their interest in food.
- **Respect Hunger Cues** - Encourage self-regulation by allowing your child to decide how much to eat. Avoid using food as a reward or punishment.
- **Maintain Appetite** - Aim to limit liquids 30 minutes before each meal time to help keep their appetite high.

WHAT IF THEY DON'T EAT?

Some factors to consider if a child is refusing to eat include:

- If they possibly may have had a large drink before their meal.
- If they are tired.
- If they have just had a snack.
- If they are distracted.

Overall, it's important to be patient and understand that it may take several trials of a new food before a child accepts it. Don't give up after the first rejection.

For more information, please visit:

Queensland Government - Fussy Eating
https://www.health.qld.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0034/650986/paeds-fussyeaters.pdf
Better Health Channel - Toddlers and Fussy Eating
<https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/toddlers-and-fussy-eating>

