

Fussy Eating in Children

Why all the fuss?

- Food refusal is common between two and nine years of age
- Childrens' appetites change based on their energy needs – children eat more during growth spurts and at the onset of puberty
- Some children use food refusal and fussy eating as a way to gain attention

What may contribute to fussiness?

- Too many snacks or drinks – these may decrease appetite
- Drinking too much milk – limit milk intake to approximately 500ml per day
- A child's mood – hunger is often reduced when feeling tired, sick or upset
- Daily activity patterns – activity level can influence appetite
- Irregular eating patterns – childrens' appetites are better when meals are kept to regular times
- Serving sizes – large meals can be off-putting

General tips on how to tempt fussy eaters

- Include your child in family meals and set a positive example by making mealtimes a happy and relaxed experience - give your child around 15-20 minutes to eat their meal
- Let children help with food preparation
- Ensure your child is seated comfortably in a chair with their back supported
- Provide 3 meals a day and small snacks in between
- Provide small servings - it's better to encourage children to ask for more
- Allow children to eat to their appetite without coercion, force or arguments

- Avoid distractions such as television and tablet computers
- Ensure your child is not filling up on drinks, especially milk, close to mealtimes
- Make mealtimes fun with novelties like fancy drinking straws, decorated cups and plates, and vegetables and sandwiches cut into various shapes
- Allow children food choices but limit these choices to 2 or 3 foods. Too many choices can make children fussier
- Avoid using food as a reward
- Avoid bribing children but praise them if they try a new food.
- Avoid offering food all day - provide food at meal and snack times only

What if my child won't drink milk?

- Calcium from milk is important for strong bones and teeth. If your child won't drink milk try the following:
 - Snack on cheese, custard and yoghurt
 - Add milk to soups, sauces and desserts
 - Add grated cheese to soups, pastas, vegetables or sauces
 - Calcium fortified soy drink can be used to replace cow's milk.

What if my child won't eat vegetables?

- Vegetables are an important source of vitamins, minerals and fibre. If your child won't eat vegetables try the following:
 - Serve raw vegetable sticks as a snack with dip or cottage cheese
 - Add diced vegetables to soups and fried rice
 - Present vegetables in a different way such as stir-fry or vegetable kebabs
 - Cut them into different shapes or sizes
 - Start a vegetable garden at home and involve the whole family
 - Ask your child to assist with buying and preparing vegetables

What if my child won't eat meat?

- Meat is a good source of protein and iron. If your child won't eat meat try the following:
 - Serve meat minced or finely chopped with gravy or a sauce
 - Serve meat in stir-fries, fried rice, casseroles or pasta sauces
 - Try dairy products, eggs, peanut butter and baked beans as an alternative source of protein

Points to remember...

- Food refusal is normal and common
- Most children will eat when hungry
- It is the responsibility of parents to decide what is offered to their child and the responsibility of the child to decide what they will eat
- Children often need to try a food at least ten times before they will eat it without a fuss
- Don't panic! Some children may be seeking your reaction when they don't eat
- Fussy eating is often a passing phase
- Everyone has likes and dislikes. If your child continues to refuse a certain food it may be that they just dislike that food

Name and Phone: