



Fussy Eaters

Many children go through phases where they become wary of new foods, or may refuse to eat certain foods. This is a normal part of growing up and is often a way of children expressing that they can make choices for themselves. Although this can be a worrying time most children continue to grow well. It is important to remember that children will not come to harm if they don't eat for a short time, as long as they remain well hydrated.

If you are worried that your child's growth is being affected, you can speak to your health visitor, school nurse or GP and they may consider referring your child to see a dietitian.

Managing meal times

It is important to set a good example to your children, have a regular meal-time routine for the whole family and make meals a relaxed and enjoyable experience. You may find the following tips useful:

- Offer regular meals every day – breakfast, lunch and evening meal; plus a snack mid-morning and mid-afternoon
- Offer a variety of foods from each food group every day as this will give children the variety of nutrients they need to maintain healthy growth
- Offer a main course and pudding at lunch and evening meal
- Sit down at a table and eat meals as a family as much as possible
- Have a clear start and finish time to a meal, e.g. asking your child to wash their hands before a meal and place their knife and fork together when a meal is finished
- Don't let meal times last longer than 30 minutes
- Reduce any distractions at meal times by switching off the TV and placing toys/electronic devices out of sight
- Use brightly coloured plates/cups/cutlery and present food in a fun way – eg making face shapes out of food
- Offer a smaller portion of food at first and give lots of praise when your child finishes this. You can gradually increase the portion size and give praise for each additional spoon/serving eaten
- Do not offer alternative foods if your child does not eat the meal they are given
- If you are offering a new food for the first time, serve with other foods that you know your child will eat. Remember it may take several attempts for your child to try a new

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food before they decide whether they like it. It is better to offer the same new food again and again within a short space of time, rather than leaving it a week before trying again

- Make a batch of a new food/meal and freeze into small portions to avoid wasting food
- Do not allow your child to drink for 1 hour before mealtimes to ensure your child is hungry for the meal

How can I manage my child's behaviour around food?

- Set expectations around meal times and encourage your child to have at least one small mouthful of their meal
- Always smile and give verbal praise when your child eats well or tries a new food
- Do not make a fuss if your child refuses to eat, this is a normal part of growing up. Avoid using food as a reward, use non-food items such as stickers instead
- A reward chart can be a good way of encouraging your child to try new foods. This can be a simple piece of paper with days of the week and stars/stickers used for a new food touched/licked/tasted. When 10 stars/stickers have been added to the chart, offer a non-food reward such as a magazine/book, a trip to the park or other activity
- Your child is telling you they have had enough to eat when they: turn their head away, push or throw the bowl away, scream or spit their food out. If this happens, remain calm and take the food away without comment. Never force feed.
- Encourage messy food play to allow your child to get used to different textures. This is sometimes better done away from meal times, expect mess!
- Encourage your child to help prepare food by helping to weigh ingredients, chopping fruit/vegetables, or adding ingredients into a mixing bowl
- If you are able to grow your own fruit or vegetables, encourage your child to help water them, and pick the fruits/vegetables once they are ripe. If you do not have access to a garden, there are a number of fruits/vegetables which can be grown in window boxes; such as carrots, strawberries, beetroot and salad leaves.

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What foods should I offer?



Bread, rice, potatoes, pasta and other starchy carbohydrates	Meat, fish, eggs, soya, beans, pulses, lentils, nuts/nut butters and other sources of protein	Dairy and calcium-fortified dairy alternatives, eg soya or oat milk, soya/coconut yogurts	Fruits and vegetables
Offer a portion at each mealtime	Offer 2-3 servings per day	Offer 3 servings every day, this can include custard and other milk-based puddings	Offer with every meal and as snacks
Provide a good source of energy and often have added vitamins and minerals	Try to include 1-2 servings of oily fish per week	Children under 2 years should be given full fat dairy products	Encourage at least 5 portions every day
	Avoid whole nuts under 5 years of age		Fruit/vegetables can be purchased fresh, frozen or canned; and may be eaten cooked or raw

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Foods High in fat and/or sugar

- May be given as occasional treats, but should not make up a significant proportion of your child's diet
- Do not offer as alternatives if main meals are refused

Vitamins and Minerals

- It is recommended that all children under the age of 5 years take a daily multivitamin supplement containing vitamins A, C and D. You may be eligible for free Healthy Start vitamins – for more information see: www.healthystart.nhs.uk
- If your child is older than 5 years but has a restrictive diet, it is a good idea that they also take a suitable daily multivitamin. Avoid using more than one supplement at a time, as you may give your child more than the recommended daily allowance of vitamins/minerals

Example Meal Plan

Breakfast

- Fortified breakfast cereal with milk
- Toast or crumpets with peanut butter
- Pancakes with raspberries
- Boiled or scrambled egg with toast soldiers or chapati

Lunch

- Jacket potato with baked beans/tuna/cheese
- Wrap/sandwich with ham/chicken/cheese and salad
- Crackers/rice cakes with cream cheese
- Daal or vegetable/meat curry with rice/chapati

Dinner

- Spaghetti bolognaise or macaroni cheese
- Meat kebab/falafel with salad and pitta bread
- Chicken/beef stew with potatoes and vegetables
- Fish fingers with home-made potato wedges and baked beans

Snacks (offer 2-3 per day, but avoid giving too close to meal times)

- Chopped fruit e.g. banana/apple/pear
- Small pot of yogurt
- Vegetable sticks e.g. cucumber/carrot/peppers with hummus
- Rice cakes with cream cheese or peanut butter

Puddings

- Chopped strawberries with ice cream
- Bananas and custard
- Yogurt with blueberries
- Rice pudding

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Drinks

It is important that your child drinks enough to meet their daily fluid requirements and avoid constipation; which can reduce appetite. Too many drinks can fill your child up and reduce their food intake. To avoid this, discourage drinking for 1 hour before mealtimes.

- Aim for around 600ml (1 pint) of milk per day as this is a nourishing drink. This can include milk added to cereals/used to make milky puddings
- Water is the best drink to offer to quench thirst
- Avoid sugary/fizzy drinks as these can damage teeth and cause tooth decay
- 1 small (125ml) glass of unsweetened fruit juice (avoid 'from concentrate' or 'fruit juice drink') diluted with water provides a good source of vitamin C
- If your child is over 1 year, it is important to wean them off the bottle and encourage drinks from a free-flowing lidded or open beaker/cup. This will avoid your child using their bottle as a comfort and drinking large volumes of fluid. Using a bottle for too long may also impact on their speech and can contribute to tooth decay.

If you require this information in another format, such as a different language, large print, braille or audio version please ask a member of staff or email patientexperience@uhb.nhs.uk.