



Central and
North West London
NHS Foundation Trust

Speech and Language Therapy Services

Information for parents



Fussy
eating



Wellbeing for life

Fussy eating

Does your child refuse or reject food at mealtimes? In children this is called 'fussy eating' and can be a difficult time for parents.

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. 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?

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.

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 your health visitor for advice on how much your child should drink).

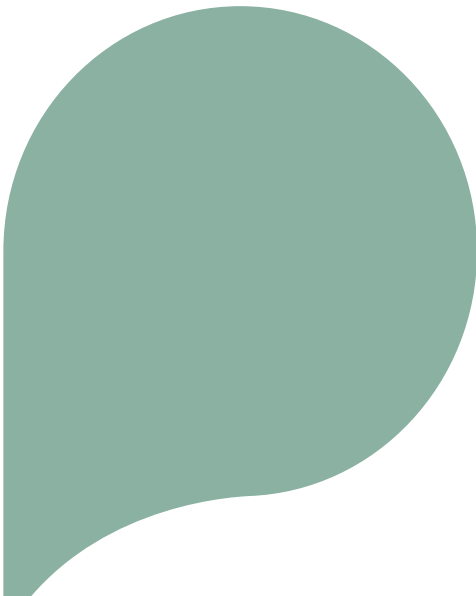
Some general ideas:

- 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 them 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. Talk to parents of children of a similar age. What are their eating habits like? Also find out what you were like at that age. Were you a fussy eater too?

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 GP 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 biting food, chewing or swallowing that might lead to vomiting or choking.

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

Tell us, we're listening

Our staff want to know how they are doing. Tell us what you think at www.cnwl.nhs.uk/feedback and then we'll know what we have to do.

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



This document is also available in other languages, large print, Braille, and audio format upon request. Please email communications.cnwl@nhs.net

Dokument ten jest na życzenie udostępniany także w innych wersjach językowych, w dużym druku, w alfabecie Braille'a lub w formacie audio.

Polish

நீங்கள் கேட்டுக்கொண்டால், இந்த ஆவணம் வேறு மொழிகளிலும், பெரிய எழுத்து அச்சிலும் அல்லது ஒலிநாடா வடிவிலும் அளிக்கப்படும்.

Tamil

درخواست پر یہ دستاویز دیگر زبانوں میں، بڑے حروف کی چھپائی اور سننے والے ذرائع پر بھی میسر ہے۔

Urdu

این مدرک همچین بنا به درخواست به زبانهای دیگر، در چاپ درشت و در فرمت صوتی موجود است.

Farsi

Šį dokumentą paprašius taip pat galima gauti kitomis kalbomis, dideliu šriftu, Brailio raštu ir garso juostoje. Prašome kreiptis el.

Lithuanian

Mediante solicitação, este documento encontra-se também disponível noutras línguas, num formato de impressão maior, em Braille e em áudio.

Portuguese

Este documento también está disponible y puede solicitarse en otros idiomas, letra grande, braille y formato de audio.

Spanish

এই ডকুমেন্ট অন্য ভাষায়, বড় প্রিন্ট আকারে, ব্রেল এবং অডিও টেপ আকারেও অনুরোধ পাওয়া যায়

Bengali

Dokumentigaan waxaa xitaa lagu heli karaa luqado kale, daabacad far waa-wayn, farta indhoolaha (Braille) iyo hab dhegaysi ah markii la soo codsado.

Somali

Настоящий документ по отдельному запросу можно получить в переводе на другие языки, напечатанным крупным шрифтом или на аудиокассете.

Russian