

Importance of nutrition

Good nutrition is very important for children's health both now and in the future. Eating habits learnt during childhood tend to continue to adulthood. It is important that your child develops a healthy relationship with food from an early age.

As parents, you want to make sure that your children like to eat and enjoy food, and don't see it as frightening or as a reward.

By the time your child is 12 months old, he or she should be eating a variety of foods, including small serves of meats, vegetables, fruits, breads and cereals and dairy foods such as milk, cheese and yoghurt.

Trying new foods leads to adventurous eating habits and your child will be more confident making food choices.

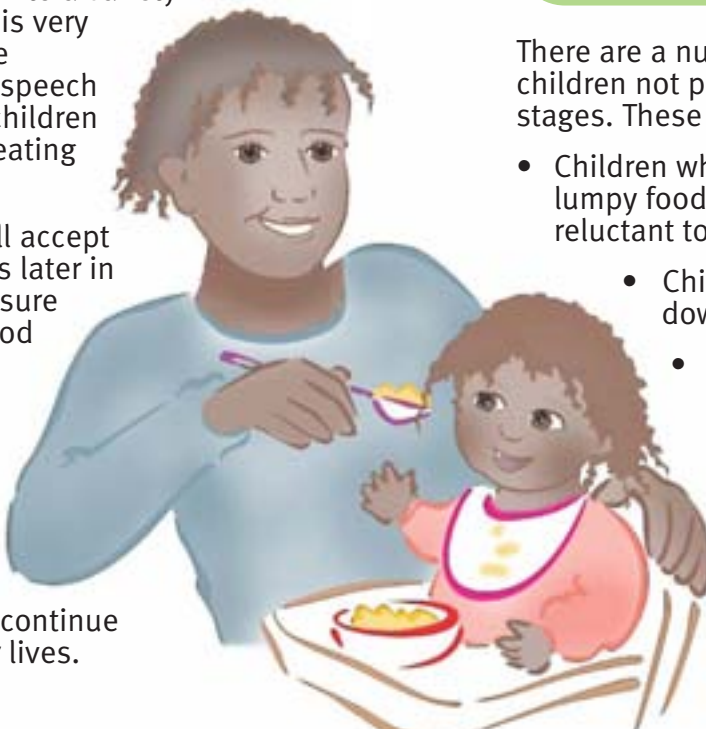
Q: What is a fussy eater?

A: A fussy eater is a child who refuses to try a new food at least half of the time.

Food textures

Early introduction to a variety of food textures is very important for the development of speech and to prepare children for the tasks of eating and drinking.

So your child will accept different textures later in childhood, exposure to a variety of food textures is essential. Delaying your child's introduction to lumpier foods may contribute to fussy eating habits that may continue throughout their lives.



Texture transition

Q: What does texture transition mean?

A: This means the order in which you should introduce new food textures to your child.

At around six months, your baby needs to start eating foods other than breast milk or formula. The order of when foods should be introduced is related to when they are nutritionally needed by your baby and when your baby's body has developed enough to handle them. Ideally small amounts of strained foods are introduced to an infant at around six months of age.

- Start with about half a teaspoon of strained food after a breast or formula feed.
- Gradually progress through the food texture stages as your infant or child masters this texture.
- By about 12 months of age most children are able to manage 'combination foods' easily.

There are a number of possible reasons for children not progressing through the food texture stages. These include:

- Children who have had previous difficulty with lumpy food or chewy foods and may be reluctant to try again.
- Children who have difficulty breaking down lumpy or chewy food.
- Children who have difficulty using their tongue to move lumps in their mouth.

For further information on introducing solids see the Child Health Information Guide in your child's Personal Health Record or ask your Child Health Nurse or Dietitian.

Life beyond pureed food...

Food texture

Example of foods

1. Strained food

These are foods that are very smooth. There are no lumps.

cooked meat, cooked vegetables (including legumes) and cooked fruit pushed through a sieve or blended to a thin puree

2. Thickened foods

These are foods that are smooth puree but are thicker. Thicker foods are often easier for young mouths to handle as the mouthful stays together longer.

baby cereals, pureed food thickened with wheat germ[★] or rice cereal, meals blended to a thick puree

3. Mashed early solid

These are soft foods that are mashed.

regular oatmeal, semolina, mashed banana or other very ripe fruit, mashed avocado, mashed potatoes, mashed squash, carrots, sweet potato, soft scrambled eggs[★]/soft boiled eggs[★], mashed tofu[★]

4. Textured early solid

These are soft foods that introduce a variety of textures or 'feels' in the mouth. They are soft and do not require chewing.

cottage cheese[★], mince and vegetables, spaghetti, mashed macaroni, mashed rice and beans

5. Lumpy solid

These are foods that have been roughly mashed where there is a combination of tastes and different sized lumps. These lumps are obvious and prominent.

tapioca pudding, apple sauce, biscuits crumbled and soaked in milk, finely ground meat, bread soaked in casserole juices

6. Easy chewy solid

These are foods that require some chewing. These foods break down easily to small pieces in the mouth when chewing. These foods are generally soft.

raisins, dry cereal pieces, squares of soft cheese[★], soft cooked green beans, cooked chicken, tuna[†] in water

7. Combination food

These types of foods contain more than one consistency. Advanced eating skills are required to manage two consistencies in the mouth at one time.

casserole (meat and sauce), vegetable soup, dry cereal with milk, noodle soup, jelly and fruit, orange, fruit yoghurt, tomato, cucumber, kiwifruit, grapes, toast, sandwiches

8. Difficult chewy solid

These foods are the most difficult foods to eat. They require a lot of jaw movement to chew the foods.

roast beef, lamb chops, pork chops, steak, raw carrots^{*}, raw celery^{*}, apple^{*}

[★] If there is a strong family history of food allergy these foods may need to be avoided until at least 12 months of age.

[†] Well cooked fish can be given but must be thoroughly checked by feeling all the fish with your fingers for bones. Limit how often you serve large fish such as tuna.

^{*} For safety reasons, large pieces of hard, raw vegetables/fruit should not be given to children under four years of age as they may cause choking. Carrot, celery pieces and apple should be grated or cooked soft and sliced thinly.

Reference

Evans Morris, S. & Dunn Klein, M. 2000, *Pre-feeding Skills: A Comprehensive Resource for Mealtime Development* (2nd Edition), Therapy Skill Builders, San Antonio.