

Guidelines for fussy eating

Mealtimes are a common source of stress for parents. Fussy eating can be a normal stage of development. Often children want to start making their own food choices. When a child refuses food, parents may become frustrated or worried their child is not eating enough. These tips are to help manage mealtimes and to develop healthy eating behaviours.

What should I offer and how much?

<p>WHAT</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include a variety of foods from the core food groups (fruits, vegetables, meats or alternatives, grains, and dairy). • Where possible, avoid preparing separate meals. Offer your child the same food the rest of the family is eating. • Finger foods may be easier to manage and can offer more enjoyment and independence. • Provide foods that are the right texture for your child. If your child is struggling with a particular texture, try a similar food that they can manage. For example, yoghurt instead of milk; mince instead of chewy meat. • Consider your child's preferences and provide options to encourage their independence. For example, offer raw or grated vegetables instead of cooked vegetables, offer sliced fruit instead of whole pieces. • Respect that they may have likes or dislikes. Offer safe or familiar foods as well as new foods.
<p>WHEN</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children respond to a mealtime routine. Offer nutritious meals and snacks about 5-6 times a day. • Keep mealtimes regular and consistent so children know what to expect. • Set aside 20 - 30 minutes for mealtimes and 10 - 20 minutes for snacks. If the food is not eaten within this time, allow your child to leave the table, or quietly remove their plate. • Aim to have 2 –2.5 hours between meals and snacks to allow time for your child to develop an appetite



HOW MUCH	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Place small quantities on your child's plate, large portions can be overwhelming for some children.• Limit to two options. For example, let them choose between two types of fruit or two sandwich fillings.• Limit milk and dairy food to two serves each day, unless advised by your child's healthcare professional. Too much dairy can decrease appetite for other foods. 1 serves of dairy is equal to 250ml of milk, $\frac{3}{4}$ cup of yoghurt or 2 slices of cheese.
DRINKS	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Try to limit water and other drinks 30 minutes before a mealtime.• Avoid giving your child soft drink or cordial and limit fruit juice. These fluids can decrease your child's appetite for foods, and they provide little nutrition.

What should a mealtime look like?

- Eat together as a family. This is an important opportunity for your child to learn about food.
- Be a good role model. Eat the same foods as your child and show your child you enjoy them.
- If you dislike a food, try not to make negative comments, and instead talk about the colour, shape, or texture of the food.
- Your role as a parent is to provide the food and create a positive environment. Allow your child to decide how much they need to eat to fill up.
- Before a meal help your child to get ready by supporting a mealtime routine. For example, providing a prompt to finish playing, helping to set the table and wash their hands to get ready.
- Serve meals before your child is too tired, tiredness can affect appetite.
- Avoid distractions, turn off screens, and remove games and toys at mealtimes. This allows children to focus on learning about their food using all their senses.



Exploring food

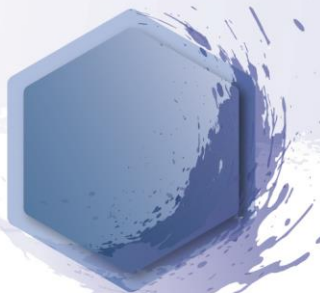
- Make meals and snacks look exciting and fun. For example, offer a range of colours or foods arranged in the shape of a face. Include some of your child's favourite foods.
- Try different foods often. Children may need to be offered foods more than 10 times before accepting it. Do not assume that they do not like that food after only one or two attempts.
- Give children time to explore new foods. Other ways to explore foods before eating include touching, smelling, licking, kissing new foods.
- Encourage involvement with food preparation, cooking and shopping. Allow them to serve healthy options onto their own plate (e.g. place shared salad on the dinner table).

Keep mealtimes positive

- Praise at least one thing at every meal. Be descriptive with your praise (e.g. "good chewing"; "good eating of your vegies").
- Avoid focusing on the 'unwanted' behaviour (e.g. not eating vegies, spitting out food).
- Offer rewards other than food, such as a favourite game, a trip to the park, stickers or stamps for their collection.
- Your child needs to associate mealtimes with positive feelings. Keep mealtimes relaxed and stay calm. Punishment will add stress to the eating experience, and this can affect your child's appetite.
- Stay calm; never force feed your child.
- Try to avoid bribing your child with food. This teaches children that some foods are more enjoyable than others.

What if they don't eat?

- If your child refuses a meal, try to think about a reason for this.
 - Did they have a big drink before their meal?
 - Are they tired?
 - Is this meal too close to a snack?
 - Have they been less active today?

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- Are they distracted?

- Wait until the next scheduled meal or snack before offering something new.
- Remain calm and avoid substituting the meal for a preferred food. Constantly offering an alternative will encourage refusal of non-preferred foods.
- Appetite changes are normal, sometimes children eat less or more than usual.

References

1. Australian Dietary Guidelines; Healthy eating for children -Brochure: www.eatforhealth.gov.au
2. Nutrition Australia fact sheets; available: www.nutritionaustralia.org.au
3. [Raise a healthy child who is a joy to feed \(ellyphysiotherapy.com.au\)](http://ellyphysiotherapy.com.au)
4. Fun not fuss resources

Key points to remember

- Offer nutritious meals and snacks, including some preferred foods and some new foods.
- Avoid milk, fruit juice and soft drinks between mealtimes.
- Avoid distractions at mealtimes
- Eat with your child and provide a positive environment.

Things I can do to improve my child's eating:

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For further information contact your Dietitian or Nutritionist