

LEAPS

learning eating active play sleep

Fussy Eaters

Improving food variety



Children learn to like new foods – continue to offer a wide variety of foods.

Children may be fussy eaters because of anxiety about different textures and tastes; some children are hypersensitive especially if there are any developmental problems or history of gastric reflux or food allergy – if it is an ongoing problem then seek help from a health professional.

1. Involve your child in menu planning, shopping and meal preparation tasks such as stirring, peeling, and serving. Remember to supervise children at all times when they are helping to prepare food and give them tasks to do that suit their age and ability to safely use different utensils and cooking equipment
2. Be a positive role model and try to have the family meal together at the table. Children learn by watching others
3. Limit main meals to 20 – 30 minutes in length and allow 10 – 20 minutes for snacks
4. Make healthy foods fun and eye-catching – make faces with vegetables or funny designs using lots of colour. Children can help by designing their own plate
5. Vary the way you prepare different foods to improve a child's acceptance of new foods e.g. try different textures (mashed potato, baked potato, roasted potato)
6. When introducing a new food, trial it with a favourite food
7. Be patient and persistent. You may need to offer a food up to 10 times within a few weeks until it is accepted
8. If a child refuses to try a new food encourage them to at least feel the food and to have just a little taste – don't give them a big serve if it is a new food and you're not sure if they will like it. Explain to them if they really don't like it they can politely spit it out into a paper napkin

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9. Encourage your child to explore food through playing, touching, growing, smelling and tasting food. Help develop autonomy by putting different foods in bowls and encouraging children to serve themselves
10. Avoid using food as a reward for children, try a sticker chart instead
11. It is up to your child to decide how much of a food they want to eat – it is your job as a parent to provide healthy food choices
12. Fussy eating is not always about disliking food, your child may just be tired, not feeling well or just not be in the best mood
13. Make sure children are feeling secure and comfortable at the table – if legs are dangling from chair offer them a footstool or if child dislikes textures of certain foods, give them a wet handcloth so they can wipe their hands if they don't like the feel of something they have picked up to eat
14. Form or link to a parent network such as a Playgroup, to chat to other parents about new ways of introducing foods
15. If you are struggling with a fussy eater seek help from an appropriate health professional, for example an experienced dietitian, pediatrician, speech pathologist, or child health nurse. See below for contact information



For more information:

- **Fun not Fuss with Food:** www.health.qld.gov.au/health_professionals/food/funnotfusswithfood.asp
- **13HEALTH:** Child Information Line (13432584)
- **Raising Children:** www.raisingchildren.net.au
- **Food Foundations:** <http://www.naql.org/category/food-foundations>
- **Playgroup Qld Inc:** www.playgroupqld.com.au
- **Dietitians Association of Australia:** <http://daa.asn.au/>
- **Speech Pathology Australia** <http://www.speechpathologyaustralia.org.au/>