

LEAPS

learning eating active play sleep

Fussy Eating Tips



What are some strategies that educators can use to help children who are fussy eaters?

1. Eat with your mouth open

As strange as this sounds and as much as we were all taught not to do this, this strategy can be helpful to 'show' children how to chew and move their tongue around in their mouth. Some children who are fussy eaters may be fussy because they are unsure what to do with the food when it is in their mouth. For example, imagine peanut butter being stuck to the roof of your mouth, and you using your tongue to sweep the peanut butter off the roof of your mouth..... A child who has just started eating may not know instinctively to do this sweeping action of the tongue to remove the stuck food, so it might be good for you to show them how to do this.

2. Play with your food

Again, this is something that we were not routinely supposed to do as children, but this can be another strategy which may help fussy eaters, as it helps decrease anxiety and allows children to learn through play. Children may be fussy eaters because they are unfamiliar with what the food will do in their mouth (the fear of the unknown). Letting them feel the food; describe its colour, texture and temperature and smelling the food will give them an idea of what they can expect when they eat the food. A child who has never eaten a cherry tomato does not know that when they bite into the tomato, the juices and seeds will squirt into their mouth. In a child who is a particularly fussy eater, getting them to play with a food they do not want to try is a step in the right direction!

What are some less obvious ways to include vegetables or fruit in food?

It can often be a challenge getting children with fussy appetites to eat an adequate amount of fruits and vegetables each day, and educators are often faced with having to hide them on the plate prior to serving a meal or snack. Although it's best to confidently display a fruit or vegetable in its natural form to a child, we understand that after a couple of rounds at the meal table arguing the point with 'little Miss or Mr', educators may be seeking another solution.

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Here are some suggestions:

- Puree vegetables in pasta sauce by using a blender or food processor. Any vegetable can be puréed such as broccoli, capsicum, carrots or spinach. Or if you're without a blender, why not try mashing steamed cauliflower into the cheese topping for a terrific macaroni and cheese dish
- Experiment with fruit filled milkshakes and smoothies; try adding strawberries to milk and blending to form a milkshake, this provides a vitamin C boost with a serve of calcium, wrapped in an inviting pink coloured drink. Or try a delicious banana smoothie by blending banana with cinnamon or vanilla with adding milk &/or yoghurt
- Including fruits and vegetables in muffins and breads is a great idea for the child who loves baked goods. Mixing grated carrot, zucchini, mashed pumpkin or corn into the dry ingredient component of your recipe will create a well-balanced snack that can be enjoyed any time of day.