

PaWS' Parent Guide



Fussy Eaters

Many children go through phases of refusing meals or being pickier with food. This can be a normal part of growing up but it can be worrying for families. Children will have good and bad days but often still get enough nutrition to grow and to keep them healthy.

Eating and feeding problems can sometimes dominate family life. It is easy to be overwhelmed when eating problems are severe and are so closely tied to your child's health and development. The fact that mealtime occurs at least three times a day, and families and children are not always able to eat at home, adds to the stress.

It is important to rule out any medical reasons for them not eating or having a restricted diet first.

- Do they have a sore throat or tooth abscess?
- Do they have chewing or swallowing difficulties?
- Are they worried about their weight or shape?

If you or your child are worried about any of the above, discuss this with your doctor.



Have you tried the following?

Regular routines. Have regular meal and snack times. Aim for 3 meals and 2 or 3 nutritious snacks a day. You want to discourage 'grazing' and encourage routine. Try to leave at least 90 minutes between meals and snacks. Try not to leave more than 4 hours between meals. Try not to rush meals as children and young people may be slow to eat but avoid letting meals last longer than 20-30 minutes

Some children find it difficult to sit to eat a whole meal. Try short times sitting and build on this so that your child is successful. Don't expect big changes after 10 minutes, an hour, or even a week. Patience and consistency with this process is key to success. Remember it isn't always easy, especially when you've had a long tiring day! Do not leave meals until your child is too hungry or tired to eat. Your child may be a slow eater, so be patient.

Cooking together. Encourage your child to choose what's for dinner and prepare the food together for the family. Explore recipe books and allow your child to choose something that looks tasty. Involve them in the whole process including shopping together for the ingredients.

Don't make meal times all about food. Make mealtimes enjoyable and not just about eating. Sit down and chat about other things. If your child struggles with the social 'chit chat' of mealtimes, try putting on some music or an audio book.

Find role models for your child. If you know any other children of the same age who are good eaters, ask them round for tea. But do not talk too much about how good the other children are. Ask an adult that your child likes and looks up to, to eat with you. Sometimes a child will eat for someone else, such as a grandparent, without any fuss.



Eat together as much as possible. The best way for your child to learn to eat and enjoy new foods is to copy you. Try to eat with them as often as you can.

Repeat dinner options. If your child rejects the food, do not force them to eat it. Just take the food away without saying anything. Try to stay calm, even if it's very frustrating. Try the food again another time.

Try not to use food as a reward. Your child may start to think of sweets as nice and vegetables as nasty.

Seek support. If your concerns persist and you continue to worry about your child's diet, consult your doctor. A food diary will enable you to build a clear picture, establish your child's likes and dislikes and might be something to share with a medical professional if you feel concerned.

Find out more:

Healthy Food Guide

<https://www.healthyfood.com/advice/fussy-eaters-when-should-you-worry/>

NHS

<https://www.nhsggc.org.uk/kids/resources/ot-activityinformation-sheets/fussy-eaters/>

PaWS' healthy snacks information and healthy schools' policy:

<https://pevenseschool.org.uk/parents/healthysnacks>

<https://pevenseschool.org.uk/statutory-info/policies/>