



Support for Fussy and Reluctant Eaters

This week we have spoken to a number of parents who have noticed their child's eating habits change following a change in routine. We would like to share some ideas and strategies this week, in the hope that mealtimes do not become an issue or friction point for our families during an already tricky time.

- Put together a weekly meal plan with input from your child(ren), that can be put up in your house so they know what they will be eating over the coming week. Shop carefully for what you need to avoid any last-minute changes.
- Think about mealtimes in your house - when and how are your children eating? Where possible, aim to eat as a family at least once a day. Is it too noisy, too quiet? If your children tend to eat alone, is their fussiness a way of seeking your attention?
- Look at the portion sizes you are serving - are they too big? This can be overwhelming, particularly for younger children.
- Some children prefer 3 smaller meals with two snack times - one mid-morning and one mid-afternoon, as opposed to three full meals with pudding.
- Do not force your child to eat or to remain at the table until they have cleared their plate. Remove the food without saying anything, however frustrating it may be.
- Look at the times you are serving meals - do not leave mealtimes until your child is too tired (or too hungry) to eat properly.
- Try to involve your child in preparing the meal. Even small children can help to wash vegetables and set the table, for example.
- If necessary, think about distraction techniques to avoid your child feeling pressured at mealtimes. This could include using talk prompts such as "would you rather" questions or a gratitude jar, having the TV or radio on in the background, or even doing puzzles whilst eating.
- Try to ensure each meal includes the 4 main food groups: fruit and vegetables, starchy carbohydrates, dairy or dairy alternatives, and proteins. This will help ensure your child gets the nutrients they need.
- Ensure your child has plenty of access to low-sugar drinks throughout the day to avoid them becoming dehydrated or constipated.



- Introduce a reward chart for trying new foods.
- Be patient with slow eaters.
- Consider offering your child food in different ways - for example, they may not enjoy cooked carrots but may enjoy raw carrots, particularly if served with a dip such as hummus or mild salsa.

Being fussy or particular about food can be a sign of anxiety in children, so you may find it useful to visit our Wellbeing Support for Parents and utilise some of the free ideas and resources there. If you have significant concerns about your child's eating or they appear to be losing weight, you should always seek advice from your GP.