

Top Tips for Fussy Eating

Develop a Routine

- Try to have meals and snacks at roughly the same time each day.
- Avoid giving your toddler large portion sizes so they can practice eating everything on their plate.
- Reduce distractions at mealtimes: turn off the TV and have your toddler sit and eat with the rest of the family or else sit next to your toddler and feed him/her before the rest of the family sits down
- Set a time-limit for meals and explain to your child that they won't be able to eat again until their next meal/snack time.

Encourage Good Eating Habits

- Introduce your child to foods with different textures, colours, and tastes from a young age.
- Encourage experimentation by encouraging your child to have at least one bite of new food. If they don't want to eat any more that's ok. Don't force your child to eat foods they don't like, just encourage experimentation.
- Toddlers are more likely to eat something new if they see you enjoying it so model enjoyment at meal times.
- Don't be too concerned if your child wants to eat the same thing every day. Encourage your toddler to try new things but if their repetitive foods are nutritious, allow them to eat what they want.

Avoid Rewarding Undesirable Meal Behaviours

- Toddlers don't differentiate between negative and positive parent attention – either is fine by them so long as they get lots of it.
- Use gentle encouragement but avoid going to huge lengths to encourage eating – if your toddler enjoys your aeroplane impersonations they may refuse to eat for an encore performance.
- If your toddler is playing with their food, pay no attention. Let your child know how much meal time is left and leave them to it.
- If your child has refused to eat their meal, don't allow them to fill up on snacks and filling drinks (milk, smoothies) afterwards.
- If your child tells you they're full (even if it's after a few minutes) wipe their hands and faces and let them leave the table. Your toddler will eat when they're hungry.

Allow Independence

- Avoid power battles with your toddler at meal times.
- Let your toddler help with the preparation of the meal – they'll be more likely to eat their meal if they've been involved
- Where possible offer meal choices but limit choices to 2-3 at a time
- If your toddler wants to feed themselves, cut their food into bite size pieces and allow them to try using a large spoon or their fingers

Fussy Eating

Any child who refuses to eat certain foods at least half the time is considered a fussy eater. Most toddlers fit this criteria.

Even kids who feed well as infants can undergo a dramatic change in their attitude towards food around 12 months of age. Some toddlers continue to devour their food, but others start to be bored by meal times.

Eight out of ten Australian parents are concerned about their child's eating habits and around a third of parents worry their toddler isn't eating enough.

If you're worried your toddler isn't eating enough try to keep in mind:

- **Toddlers can tell you when they're hungry and when they're full**
- **Toddlers eat to a different schedule, adults eat at meal times, but toddlers eat when they're hungry**
- **If your toddler is energetic and healthy they're probably getting enough food**

If you're still worried, check your child's weight on an age and height chart.

Fussy eating isn't always about food, often it's about control and seeking a reaction from mum or dad. The good news is this makes fussy eating solvable.

This tips sheet contains basic strategies for managing fussy eating. If you have further concerns, speak to your GP about a referral to a child clinical psychologist.