

ADVICE FOR PARENTS OF FUSSY EATERS

Children often go through phases of refusing to eat particular foods. This can be a worrying and upsetting time for parents, and it is therefore reassuring to know that fussy eating is very common and if the correct techniques are used, may only last a few weeks.

A healthy child rarely causes themselves any long term problems if they don't eat enough for a short while. If the problem persists or your child is not growing well, seek advice from a healthcare professional.



WHY?

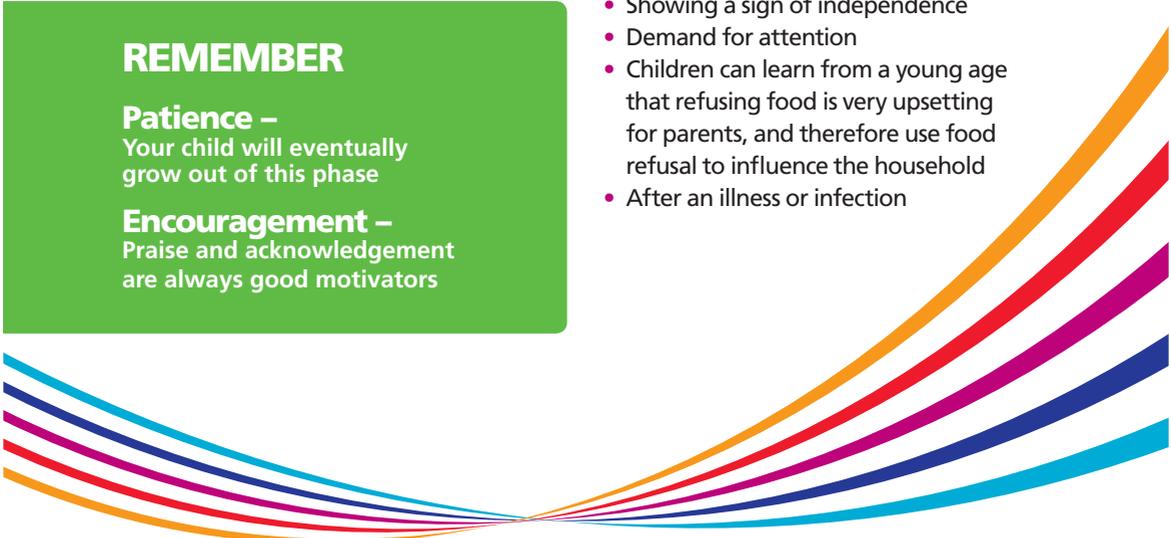
Fussy eating in children can be for the following reasons:

- Showing a sign of independence
- Demand for attention
- Children can learn from a young age that refusing food is very upsetting for parents, and therefore use food refusal to influence the household
- After an illness or infection

REMEMBER

Patience –
Your child will eventually grow out of this phase

Encouragement –
Praise and acknowledgement are always good motivators





SO...

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Children are all different. The following suggestions might help to relieve some of the stress and tension at mealtimes and reduce fussy eating:

WHAT YOU SHOULD DO

- Keep meal times short – half an hour is enough for most children.
- Have regular meals and try to avoid snacks and drinks too close to meal times. Leave at least 2 hours between snacks and meals.
- Eat the same meals at the same time as your children. Remember children learn from you – let them see you eat and enjoy a wide variety of foods.
- Ensure main meals involve sitting at a table.
- Make meal times fun and sociable. This can be a time to discuss events that have happened during the day.
- Involve children in meal selection, preparation and cooking.
- Offer small colourful portions at meal times. If these are finished more can be offered.
- Avoid distractions such as television, music and toys. Meals should be calm and relaxing.
- If your child refuses a food at first, leave it a few days and try again – it may take 17–20 times before new food is accepted.
- Offer a new food with a familiar food or in a different way e.g. chopped, mashed, roasted.

WHAT YOU SHOULDN'T DO

- Do not let young children fill up on drinks before a meal. If a child wants a drink before a meal, only offer a small amount and always offer water first.
- Do not let your child drink milk throughout the day. Healthy children between the ages of 1 and 12 need no more than three dairy servings each day. One portion of milk is 100–150ml.
- Never coax, force or bribe a child to eat.
- When a meal is refused, take away the food without making a fuss.
- When offering a new food do not remind your child that they have refused the food in the past.
- Never offer alternative food or drinks; if a meal is refused this may be seen as a reward and therefore prolong the food refusal.
- Do not try to hide refused food in another familiar food. This may lead the toddler to refuse the familiar food as well.

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