



Fussy eaters

Do you have a child who picks at their food or will only eat certain things, or do you have a child who will wolf down anything?

Even the best of eaters may still draw the line at vegetables or certain foods. It's probably one of the most stressful topics for any parent so here are a few pointers to encourage children to eat a wider range of foods.

There are always some things to consider:

- Have they always been fussy or is it something that has started recently?
- Is it about control and independence?
- Is there an intolerance to any foods, that make them feel uncomfortable after they eat?
- Food neophobia – scared of trying new foods – sometimes children need to see a new food, touch it, smell it, see others eating it many times before they will put it in their mouth

How we learn to eat is based on sensory perception, size, colour, smell, taste. This involves a lot of nerves and muscles! You may find that children like their food to be separated on the plate and that foods with mixed textures, flavours and colours are not a child's favourite e.g. stews or casseroles. Understanding what your child does or doesn't like about food can help you to interpret how they can eat better.

Points to get your child to eat more food:

- Eat with your child, even if they don't eat everything you eat. As they see you eat foods they are fearful of, they will become less fearful over time.
- Don't bribe them, it will make it sound like those foods e.g., ice cream, will be better than the foods we want to them to eat.
- They will stop eating when they have had enough. 'You don't have to eat anymore but you do need to come and sit with us whilst we eat' is a useful phrase.
- Make sure vegetables etc. taste nice! Do you like to eat food that is boring? Try adding fried garlic, onions, or putting veggies into a sauce like tomato, or a soy based dressing. Try not to hide them though, make sure they know that veggies are in things so that they trust you.
- Take the child shopping and let them pick a new food every week and then let them help you in the kitchen, they will start to trust these foods better.
- Deconstruct meals so that ingredients are individual, and they can add/eat what they want.
- Serve a favourite flavour with a food they haven't tried before.
- Try not to ask them if they like the food or talk about the food. Try chatting about other things, talk about your day, what you would like to do the next day etc.
Remember to smile, it will help lower stress levels!

Consistency is key with how you address this issue. I will be talking about this in greater depth and about healthy breakfasts during a parent talk on 27th of January via Zoom. Please do join me there, there will be time for Q&A at the end.