

Nutrition and Dietetics

Eating problems in school aged children

This information sheet is aimed at children who have a limited diet and who are resistant to widening their choice of foods.

Refusing food is common in young children and sometimes continues to older ages. This can be very worrying for parents. Often children can remain healthy when they are eating a very restricted diet. A children's multivitamin and mineral supplement can be useful.

Are mealtimes very difficult?

Children's eating is only likely to change once mealtimes become more pleasant. Try not to show that you are worried or annoyed by your child not eating. All parents, grandparents and carers should follow these ideas.

- Is your child feeling under pressure to eat?
- Limit the amount of time your child is expected to be at the table. 30 minutes should be the maximum.
- Is your child a slow eater? Give them time, without being rushed to finish their food.
- Try to eat together at a table or coffee table.
- Try to eat in a calm relaxed area, without the television, earphones, and mobile phones on.
- Try to take the emotion out of meal times. Avoid talking about the food and commenting on how much or how little is being eaten.
- Talk about other subjects like holidays, football and friends. Try to make the mealtime a pleasant time to be together.
- Be careful not to give attention to behaviours that you don't like.



Patient Information

Equally, don't praise when food is eaten.

- Never force your child to eat. This always makes things worse.

What food should I give?

Changes in eating and behaviour will come slowly. The first steps are for your child to start to enjoy mealtimes and develop a positive relationship with food. Positive changes with actual food intake will come after that.

Helpful mealtime reminders:

- No food is a bad food.
- Give foods you know your child likes and enjoys. However, asking your child what they would like is not helpful.
- If your child refuses the meal that you have given, do not offer an alternative. Try, "OK, just sit there while we eat".
- Always offer a pudding or dessert, even if the meal isn't eaten. Take the meal away without comment, then offer pudding or dessert.
- Offer regular meals and snacks in between. This is better than letting your child 'pick' through the whole day. Establish a pattern of Breakfast, snack, mid-day meal, snack, evening meal, and evening snack.
- Avoid giving drinks or snacks immediately before a meal.
- Offer small portions that your child can manage. There is satisfaction in finishing what is on the plate and they can request more.

Children (or parents) who can't bear mess

Feeding problems sometimes start and remain because of a difficulty with touch, texture and smell of substances. This can be anything from, materials, paints, creams, and foods. If as a parent you find this difficult, try not to show this to your child. Or ask someone else to do the following.

- Encourage any touch and smell experiences with different substances such as: sand, paints, soil.
- Exploring smells can also be helpful. For example: perfume testers, fish and chip and curry smells.
- Try to involve your child in preparing meals and cooking together.

Patient Information

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