



Survival guide for fussy eaters: Easy steps to help combat fussy eating

Tips that will be **helpful** when trying to get your child to eat

1. **Eat with your child** as often as you possibly can, toddlers learn by imitating their parents and often other children that they come into contact with.
2. **Try and develop a daily routine** of three meals and two snacks at set times throughout the day and around your toddler's sleeping pattern.
3. **Offer two courses at meal times**, one savoury followed by one sweet course. This gives two opportunities for the toddler to explore a wider variety of foods whilst giving them the calorific content that they need.
4. **Praise toddlers** when they eat well or try something new for the first time; help them to feel like they have really achieved something special.
5. **Arrange for your child to eat with other toddlers** that are not fussy eaters as often as possible. Some toddlers tend to eat better when encouraged by peers of their own age because they don't want to feel as if they are 'missing out'.
6. **Try and always give small portions** rather than putting lots on your child's plate, you can always offer them more if they finish what they have in front of them. Little ones can be overwhelmed by large portions and then lose their appetite.
7. **Offer finger food** where you can and as often as you can. This is because young children tend to enjoy having control when it comes to feeding themselves.
8. **Eat in a calm, relaxed environment** (preferably at a table with the family) and eliminate all distractions such as TV, games and toys. Toddlers can only concentrate on one thing at a time; distractions can make it more difficult for them to concentrate on eating.
9. **Learn to recognise the signs that your child has had enough to eat**, and then accept that the child has eaten enough, removing any uneaten food without comment.



Toddlers have many different ways of telling you that they have had enough – they may:



- Say no
- Hold food in their mouth and refuse to swallow it
- Keep their mouth shut when food is offered
- Spit food out repeatedly
- Turn their head away from food being offered
- Cry, shout or scream
- Push away a spoon bowl or plate containing food
- Gag or retch

10. **Involve toddlers in food shopping and preparing** parts of the meal and let them help to lay the table.
11. **If you are concerned about your toddler's eating, use a food diary** to list your toddler's food intake over a few days to a week, highlighting anything new they have tried. If, on review, you can see that there are foods from all food groups, and some variety within each group, then you can reassure yourself that the problem may not be as big as you initially thought.

Things that you should **avoid** when trying to get your child to eat



1. **Don't rush** a meal – some toddlers will naturally eat more slowly, and rushing a meal may reduce their appetite or make them anxious. 20 minutes is usually an adequate time for a young child to spend over a meal.
2. **Don't insist** that your child has to eat everything that you have put on their plate or try to pressure them to eat more when they are indicating to you that they have had enough; toddlers should be allowed to eat to their own appetite.
3. **Don't take away a meal and offer something different** if a child is refusing to eat what you put in front of them. They will soon learn to take advantage of this, and in the long run it is better to offer family meals and accept that your child will prefer some foods to others. Always try to offer one food at each meal that you know they will eat, because then you know that they aren't going to go hungry.
4. **Don't offer large drinks within an hour before a meal** (e.g. milk, juice or squash) as this could fill your child up and reduce their appetite and make them less likely to want to eat their food.
5. **Don't offer snacks to your child just before a meal** this will fill them up and make them feel less hungry at meal times.
6. **Avoid giving a snack very soon after you have had a meal** if they haven't eaten a lot during the meal. Many parents do this to ensure that their little one has eaten something; however it is best to get yourselves into a set meal routine and wait until their next snack time before offering food again.
7. **Don't assume that if your child refuses a particular food once, they will never eat it again.** Toddler's taste buds are constantly changing as they grow and develop. Some toddlers need to be offered or try foods around 10-15 times before they feel confident enough to eat them without fuss.
8. **Never feel guilty if one meal time turns into a disaster.** It happens, shake it off, put it behind you and approach the next meal time with a positive attitude. Parents also learn by making mistakes.