

Fussy eating is common amongst toddlers and is considered to be a normal part of their development. When contending with a fussy eater it can be worrying and stressful, and easy to get locked in a battle of wills. However the way we deal with the situation is what impacts their eating habits. This leaflet will give you hints and tips to help you.

What can cause fussy eating?

There are a number of factors which can impact your child's food acceptance. These include:

- A lack of routine - if your child does not have a snack and mealtime routine they may graze more during the day. This may result in your child not being hungry or not interested in food at mealtimes
- Consuming large amounts of milk, juice and/or other drinks - this will fill them up and make them less likely to eat the food you are offering them
- Feeling tired - if your child is tired at mealtimes they may feel uninterested in trying new foods. Having routines can help prevent this
- Distractions during mealtimes - Mealtimes are a social experience so it is good to minimize distractions. Some parents feel having toys, tv or tablets in front of their child during mealtimes helps with eating. This may work in the short term however your child will not be engaging in mealtimes and does not help with introducing new food.
- Delaying texture progression during weaning - you may struggle to introduce textured food later



Strategies for fussy eating:

- **Repeated exposure** - the more exposure your child has to a type of food the more familiar they become with its color, taste and texture and the more likely they are to trying it. It can take 15-20 tries of a food before children are willing to try new food. It is important to persevere, it can take time to accept new foods
- **Sit down together and eat the same foods** - children like to copy, so if they see other family members/friends eating the food it often encourages them to taste it themselves.
- **Make a routine** - it is helpful to have a good meal and snack routine. try to offer meals and snacks at similar times each day. Ensure mealtimes are not when your child is really hungry or tired
- **Think small** - do not serve out large portions of food to your child as it can be overwhelming. Do not worry if your child does not eat all the food you put on their plate.
- **Avoid giving alternative food or milk/juice** if your child is not interested in the first one, just remove the food and make no comment. Giving an alternative makes your child think that if they refuse they will be offered something else which makes the fussy eating worse
- **Avoid distractions** during mealtimes, e.g. phones/tv etc. A social mealtime where children are engaged is more encouraging. Make sure mealtimes are relaxed. If children feel pressure to eat, it may make they feel more anxious and less likely to eat
- **Offer non-food rewards.** Praise your child for trying new foods, or sitting nicely at the table. This will help encourage good behaviour. Use rewards such as star charts, time to play at the park, choosing a book to read etc
- **Celebrate even the smallest success.** It may just be touching or licking a new food but that is a huge progress.
- **Involve your child** in menu planning/shopping or cooking with you. This gets them interested in food, and helps with encouraging them to touch new food. They are also more likely to taste the food when they have been involved cooking it.
- **Remember to be patient, these changes do not just happen overnight.**

If you have any questions or would like more information contact Ruth Davie, Community Nutritionist at ruth.davie@pennypittrust.com