

Helpful hints for encouraging eating together

It is very common for children to go through a stage of being less interested in food and being fussier about the foods that they will eat.

This is sometimes because as children move into the toddler stage the rate at which they grow becomes slower and their appetite naturally reduces. Also, at this stage, children are very busy learning new skills and are less interested in stopping what they are doing and sitting down to eat. Toddlers also are needing to become more independent – they will be eager to feed themselves and refusing food is a good way of asserting themselves!

Don't worry about what your child eats at each meal or during each day. We all have days when we will eat more or less than others. It is better if you can think about what your child eats over the period of a week. If your child is well and has plenty of energy then they are getting what they need! Remember things like a period of illness, teething or being constipated will also affect appetite.

What to try

- Try and stick to a regular routine of three meals at breakfast, lunch and tea-time and a mid-morning and mid-afternoon snack. Leave at least 2 hours between meals and snacks. Try and eat together as a family as often as possible so that your child sees you enjoy eating.
- Offer a small portion of simple healthy and colourful food. Children often feel overwhelmed by larger portions and refuse to eat. Praise them for what they do eat and you can always offer more.
- Where possible involve them in shopping for food, choosing the family food and preparing the food together.
- Give your child a small portion of the same food as the rest of the family, but try offering new foods separately. A really nice idea is to put a sharing plate of new and colourful foods on the table for everyone in the family to try together. Also, have a go at presenting foods that they will eat in different ways, grated carrot as well as carrot batons or roasted potatoes as well as chips.
- Where possible have foods that they can feed themselves available. You might have to clean up afterwards but children eat more if they can have more control. Offer finger foods such as small sandwiches, a few chips, fingers of vegetables or fruit that are easy to hold and munch on or breadsticks and a dip – these are often firm favourites.





Helpful hints for encouraging eating together

- Remember that just because your child says they don't like a food once that this doesn't mean that you shouldn't offer it again. It takes between 12 and 15 times of trying a new food before you decide you like/dislike something!
- Keep calm if the meal is not eaten. Mealtimes should only last 20 minutes at this stage. If your child has refused it do not offer an alternative; calmly clear away the plate without comment and then offer something different at the next meal or snack-time.
- Make opportunities at other times of the day (not at mealtimes) to play with your child doing fun activities exploring foods. You can enjoy squashing, squeezing, rolling, building, posting and painting with food. This will really help to build your child's confidence to enjoy food without any expectation or pressure to eat it.

What not to do!

- Don't let your child fill up on drinks before a meal.
- Don't give a bottle of milk instead of a meal.
- Don't try and hide food that isn't liked in a food that your child is happy to eat. They may then refuse to eat that as well!
- Don't offer an alternative meal or drink if your child won't eat. Calmly clear the food away without commenting.
- Never coax, force or bribe a child to eat.
- Don't use toys or the television as a distraction when eating but do use mealtimes a chance to sit, talk and eat together as a family.