

Children's Speech and Language Therapy Service

Fussy Eaters

Being a fussy eater and picky about foods is a common part of a child's development. However, it may mean that you worry about the amount or type of foods your child eats, and they may be reluctant to try new foods. Children can pick up on feelings of anxiety and stress during mealtimes. It is important that despite this, adults don't place pressure on the child to eat or drink. Please see the tips below for keeping mealtimes positive:

- Try offering smaller portions, reducing the pressure to eat a bigger meal. Offer more if the first portion is finished.
- Always make sure that there is a safe food available at mealtimes to reduce anxiety and keep them at the table for longer.
- Try to keep mealtimes to a maximum 30 minutes to ensure they remain positive (this may need to be shorter for some children). If they are hungry, it is likely they will eat during that time, otherwise, clear things away and be reassured that they will probably eat more at the next meal.
- Offer finger foods as part of the meal. It means your child has control over feeding themselves, and they can touch and explore the food before they eat it.
- Allow them to get messy and explore foods during the mealtime. Try not to wash or wipe their hands and face until the end to help build up the tolerance of being messy.
- Engage in messy play activities with your child- these should be done outside of mealtimes and there should be no expectation for your child to eat the food, only experience it. Please see our other leaflet called 'Messy Food Play'.
- Let your child help out with tasks and activities involving food, such as baking, cooking and putting away the shopping.
- Try to ensure there are positive role models during mealtimes and snacks.