

Fussy eaters

Often a normal part of growing up

'Many parents experience problems around meal times with their children. Many children go through phases of refusing to eat, being 'fussy' eaters, or having other eating problems. This is often a normal part of growing up.

It's natural for parents to worry about whether their child is getting enough to eat. As long as your child is active and gaining weight, and it's obvious they're not ill, then they're getting enough to eat.

Try to make sure your child eats some food from the four main food groups (milk and dairy products, starchy foods, fruit and vegetables, protein), even if it's always the same old favourites. Gradually introduce other foods or go back to the foods your child didn't like before and try them again.

After the first year weight gain will slow down. This will affect their appetite. Your toddler may well eat lots at some meals, and barely touch anything during others.

You may feel that your toddler cannot sit still long enough to eat much but they are generally good at regulating their own food intake. Picky eating may also be your toddler's way of showing independence. Many toddlers want to see how far they can push the limits of your authority and try to assert some control. This is one reason why pressurising your toddler to eat will often backfire. Try to keep mealtimes stress free and sociable.

Health visitor says

Your health visitor or GP can weigh and measure your toddler to check that he is growing well, and reassure you. If the problem shows no sign of improving, or if you are worried about your child's weight, growth, or health you should contact your GP or health visitor.

Tips which may help

- **Eat well and eat together**, whenever you can.
- **Limit snacking** between meals.
- Give lots of **praise and encouragement** for good eating.
- Stick to a **routine for mealtimes**.
- **Limit the options** at mealtimes offer a meal that includes at least one thing you know they like.
- **Introduce new foods gently** and offer just one new food at a time.
- **Keep an eye on milky and sweetened drinks** and **sugary snacks** which may fill them up resulting in poor appetite at mealtimes.
- **Consider your toddler's sensitive palate**, they may not like the texture, colour, or taste of some foods.
- **Think about a vitamin supplement** specially designed for toddlers. It may be useful if your toddler is a fussy eater. Ask about the Healthy Start scheme.
- **Get them involved** in preparing and tasting food.

1

My child often refuses to eat anything so I make him sit at the table for an hour.

2

Set a time limit of 20-30 minutes. If the food isn't eaten, take it away.

3

Don't get cross. Refusing food often loses its appeal if you ignore it.