

FUSSY EATING

Meal times with fussy eaters can be a battle. You're not alone!

Many parents face fussy eating as it's known to be a common phase in a child's development. Your little one's appetite changes to reflect their growth and as growth slows after the first year, so does their appetite.

It's important not to lose hope - children from 6 months are open to discovering new foods.

So let's have a look at what you can do to end mealtime struggles and help your little one eat a healthy, balanced diet.

Division of Responsibility

The Division of Responsibility is an approach developed by Ellyn Satter - dietitian and family therapist - that breaks down the parent's roles vs the child's roles to prevent and solve feeding issues.



This is a great way to involve both you as a parent, and your child to make mealtimes pleasant. It also helps your child learn their own hunger and fullness cues.

For Babies

Babies decide how much they want to eat.

You aren't deciding when and where yet but responding to their cues is the way to go. Let your little one choose how much they eat and not pressure them to drink more or less.

For Older Babies and Young Toddlers

At this age you will still let your little one decide how much they eat but now you will start to decide when and where they will eat.

Babies and young toddlers at this age will not like a strict meal time, so take your time to figure out mealtimes that work best for you and your little one.

For Toddlers and Older Children

It is important to start structured meal times as your baby gets into toddler-hood with some trial and error. Your little one may refuse food you give them or not eat at mealtime but want a snack a few minutes later. These are signs of when to set specific times for meals.

Helping your Child Develop Good Eating Habits

- Set a good example. Children model their parent's behaviour.
- Have regular meal and snack times to promote good appetite.
- Try to avoid distractions such as television.
- Provide your family with quiet activities just before mealtime. Fatigue or over-excitement can lessen appetite.
- Serve finger foods with a variety of colours, textures, shapes and taste. Children respond well to attractively presented foods.
- Avoid using sweets or 'sometimes' foods as bribes, rewards or special treats. Also don't withhold food as a form of punishment.
- If your little one refuses to eat or finish a meal, quietly remove the food and allow them to leave the table. Children know when they have had enough.
- It may take ten or more tastes of a new food before a child will learn to accept a new flavour.
- Offer new foods with foods you know the child likes and at a time of the day when the child is hungriest.

Refusal to eat

A child may not be hungry, may be unwell or teething.

- Allow 20-30 minutes for the child to eat, then quietly and casually remove the plate.
- Don't resort to bribery or force. Bribing children with the promise of dessert if vegetables are eaten can make vegetables seem even less desirable and dessert being sought after.
- Do not provide an alternative you know they will eat, such as chips or biscuits, etc. This sends the message that they are being rewarded for being fussy.

The Vegetable War

It is very common for children to refuse vegetables.

- Offer a large variety of cooked and raw vegetables as snacks.
- Avoiding bitter flavours is common. Offer green leafy vegetables when your baby is young and provide plenty of opportunities to learn to like them.
- Add grated or diced vegetables to soups, stews, rissoles, meat loaf, baked goods, tacos, homemade pizzas, pasta sauces and stir-fried meats.
- Keep offering small portions. Exposure leads to acceptance and children's likes and dislikes change quickly.
- Encourage your little one to help prepare vegetables and salads, e.g. tearing the lettuce leaves.
- Offer praise for engaging with a new vegetable, even if this is just allowing it on the plate or licking it. Talk about the colour, smell and texture.

To find out more, check out these helpful resources:

<https://www.ellynsatterinstitute.org/>

https://www.health.qld.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0034/650986/paeds-fussyeaters.pdf

<https://raisingchildren.net.au/toddlers/nutrition-fitness/common-concerns/fussy-eating>