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Eat Better

Fussy Eaters

Some children will eat anything; trying new foods and liking most things. Other children find this harder, sometimes struggling with different tastes and textures and limiting themselves to a few types of food.

Some children's eating is affected by their emotions and helping them find ways to cope with difficult feelings and experiences is the key to improving their diet.

We know it is important that children have a varied and balanced diet with lots of fruit and vegetables. Parents want to do their best for their child and can feel really worried when their children are going through a picky phase.

Children can find it stressful too. It can cause a lot of family upset and this can make the problem more difficult to deal with.

Help with Fussy Eaters

It is important to remember most children get less fussy and begin to eat a wider range of foods as they get older. Trying to keep calm and relaxed, can keep meal time stress levels down for the whole family.

Early Days - Weaning

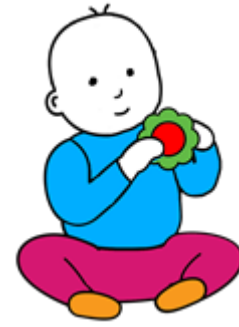
Starting Weaning

The recommendation is that babies do not start weaning foods until they are six months old. This means they are likely to be able to;

- Sit up steadily

- Get things from hand to mouth
- Swallow and not spit back out foods.

This is important because it helps your baby have a positive experience of food from the start. If you try weaning foods and your baby is not interested or seems upset – take a break for a few days and then try again.



Exploring First Foods

Until your baby is around a year old they get the bulk of their nutrition from milk. So relax and enjoy letting your baby explore and try different textures and flavours.

- Let your baby feed themselves as much as possible – this makes them feel in control and builds confidence.
- Give small amounts – you can always give more if it is a hit.
- Don't worry if they mainly squish and play with the food this is an important stage in getting used to smells and textures.
- Some days your baby will not be interested – this is fine don't push it, try again another day.
- If your baby has a favourite weaning food mix it with something they are less sure about.

Weaning Worries

Weaning your baby can feel like a big step and you might feel a bit anxious about it. Babies are very tuned in to this and may pick up on your worries.

- Try and put on a positive face and give lots of praise.
- Have someone with you to begin with for support if you feel worried.
- Watch the St John's ambulance video on [helping a choking baby](https://www.sja.org.uk/get-advice/first-aid-advice/choking/baby-choking/). (<https://www.sja.org.uk/get-advice/first-aid-advice/choking/baby-choking/>).

Choking is very rare but knowing what you would need to do can help reduce anxiety.

If your baby does cough and splutter reassure them using a calm and quiet voice.

Find out more about weaning ([/healthy-lifestyles/infant-feeding/weaning-moving-on/weaning-your-baby/](#))

Toddlers & Young Children

It is very common for toddlers and young children to seem fussy eaters at times. This might be because;

- Their growth rate slows from around a year old and their appetite is less because of this.
- They are too 'busy' to stop and eat.
- It is one of the things they can be 'in control of' and they are interested in the reaction they get when they refuse foods.
- They have a good 'stop when you are full' instinct – so they eat more some days than others. This is a good thing.



Things You Can do During Mealtimes

One of the best things to do if your child refuses foods is to show little reaction to it. If your child has plenty of energy and is weeing and pooing ok it is likely they are getting enough to eat.

- Eat together as much as possible; set a good example by eating the healthy range of foods you want your child to eat.
- Keep portions small – your child has a little tummy – about the size of their clenched fist.
- Stick to regular mealtimes with a couple of healthy snacks– make sure your child is hungry at mealtimes by being active.
- Keep mealtimes short (about 20/30 minutes) without distractions like TV or other screens – put leftovers in the bin and move on with the day.
- Don't talk about some foods as 'treats' like puddings or sweets – talk positively about all types of food.

Offering Alternative Options

Remember you decide what your child has to eat at home.

- Don't offer them other options once you have decided what's for lunch / tea.
- Offer healthy snacks like fruit or cereal if they are hungry later
- Try and include some foods they like in the next meal.

- Avoid making separate meals for different family members – this is hard work for you and can be a hard habit to break.

Limited Diets

Some children go through a stage of only eating a small range of foods – this will usually pass.

- Keep offering other foods in very small amounts. Eat with your child and let them see you trying and enjoying the foods you would like them to eat.
- Don't push your child to try them if they don't want to. Try again another day.
- Try not to get into mealtime battles – they rarely work and can increase the anxiety for you and your child.
- Giving a children's multi-vitamin can help you feel less worried about your child's nutrition.

Research shows that it is very, very rare for fussy children to suffer long term health problems because of fussy eating.

Older Children & Teens

You may have been coping with a fussy eater for a long time or they may just be beginning to eat a less varied diet.

- Older children and adolescents are beginning to feel the need to show they are independent and food is one way they might do this.
- They are becoming more influenced by friends.
- They might be choosing how to spend their own money / dinner money for the first time.
- They might be restricting their food intake to control their body shape.



Offer Support

Keeping calm about what your child chooses to eat, or not, is still important.

Being a picky eater can be difficult for children as they get older as they want to do more things socially. They might feel ready to work on trying more foods. Offer to help them with this.

Food Restriction

If you think your child is restricting foods because of worries about their appearance;

- Talk to them about the importance of being active and making healthy food choices
- Talk about the images of **body shape** (https://www.youngminds.org.uk/about-us/reports-and-impact/policy-reports/how-does-body-image-impact-young-people-s-mental-health/?gclid=EAlalQobChMlvufj_ic7AIVM4BQBh0-lwXBEAAYASAAEgKryfD_BwE) in the media and how this puts pressure on young people.
- Trust your instincts if you feel worried and get advice early.

Read more about warning signs

(<https://childmind.org/article/when-to-worry-about-an-eating-disorder/>)

Children With Additional Needs

Some children with additional needs struggle with eating as a part of the challenges they face. This can be very hard to cope with for them and for parents and carers.

- They may have had difficult eating experiences in the past.
- They may be extra sensitive to tastes, textures and smells.



Healthy Diet

Children and young people with learning disabilities have a higher chance of being under or overweight. Helping to have a healthy diet is important but it can take time and patience to make progress. Some signs you might notice are:

- A limited diet and refusing of new foods
- Losing or gaining weight
- Eating 'non foods' known as **pica** (<https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/professional-practice/managing-pica>).
- 'Choking' whilst eating
- Child (and family) not able to enjoy the social side of mealtimes.

What To Do If You're Worried

Keeping a food diary (see download below) of what your child is eating and what is happening when mealtimes go well and what might be adding to stressful mealtimes. It can be helpful to:

- **Explain** – use words and pictures to talk about healthy foods
- **Find ways to be active** – helps keep children at a healthy weight and have a healthy appetite
- **Set a good example** – Let them see you enjoying a wide range of healthy foods
- **Let them explore** – touch, smell and taste without pressure to eat it– playing with food can build confidence
- **Work out what works best for your child** – some children find being around hustle and bustle at mealtimes helps, others needs peace and quiet.

Acting as if you are not too worried by their eating habits is important. Picking up on your anxiety can increase stress for you all. Get support for you from friends and family out of earshot of your child. It can help to join forums for families of children and young people with similar challenges.

Some children will continue to find eating a challenge. Although it is not easy try not to give yourself a hard time about it, you can only do your best. There is support to help you and your child. Talk to the team who know your child best or call Just One Number to speak to a health professional.

When to Get More Advice

Most children's picky eating will improve over time. If you are worried that your child's eating habits are impacting on their physical and / or mental health it is important to seek advice.

Speak to their early years setting, school, your GP or call Just One Number to talk to a health professional if:

- You are worried about your child's weight or growth
- Your child is eating less than ten different foods
- Your child is tired and lacks energy
- Your child often struggles to poo / has diarrhoea

- You think your child's eating is being affected by their mental health.

Self Help Books

Books for parents:

- **Raising a healthy, happy eater:** A stage by stage guide to setting your child on the path to adventurous eating. By Nimali Fernando, Melanie Potock.
- **Food refusal and Avoidant Eating in Children, including those with Autism Spectrum Conditions. A practical guide for parents and professionals.** By Gillian Harris and Elizabeth Shea.



Books for children:

- **Eat your Greens Goldilocks** By Steve Smallman.
- **Good Enough to Eat** By Lizzy Rockwell.

Downloads

Food Diary

Download
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Who can Help?

You can contact the Healthy Child Programme by calling Just One Number on **0300 300 0123** or texting **Parentline** on **07520 631590**. Our opening hours are 8am–6pm Monday–Friday (excluding bank holidays) and 9am–1pm on Saturdays.

If you are 11-19 you can text **ChatHealth** on **07480 635060** for confidential advice from one of our team.

You can speak to other Norfolk parents and carers by clicking our online community forum below.

Ask Norfolk Parents

(Click here to speak with other parents & carers)

(<https://healthunlocked.com/one-norfolk-parents>)

NORFOLK COMMUNITY
DIRECTORY

Information, advice, services and activities across Norfolk

(<https://www.norfolk.gov.uk/norfolk-directory>)

Also in this section...

Eating Habits and Portion Size → (</healthy-lifestyles/eat-better/eating-habits-and-portion-size/>)

Eating on a Budget → (</healthy-lifestyles/eat-better/eating-on-a-budget/>)

Eating Well in Pregnancy → (</healthy-lifestyles/eat-better/eating-well-in-pregnancy/>)

Family Cooking → (</healthy-lifestyles/eat-better/family-cooking/>)

Food Labels	→	(/healthy-lifestyles/eat-better/food-labels/)
Food Poverty	→	(/healthy-lifestyles/eat-better/food-poverty/)
Fussy Eaters	→	(/healthy-lifestyles/eat-better/fussy-eaters/)
Healthy Start	→	(/healthy-lifestyles/eat-better/healthy-start/)
Lunch Boxes	→	(/healthy-lifestyles/eat-better/lunch-boxes/)
Eat Better	→	(/healthy-lifestyles/eat-better/)
Healthy Lifestyles	→	(/healthy-lifestyles/)

Still Worried / Need More Help? (/our-services/still-worried/)

Need More Information

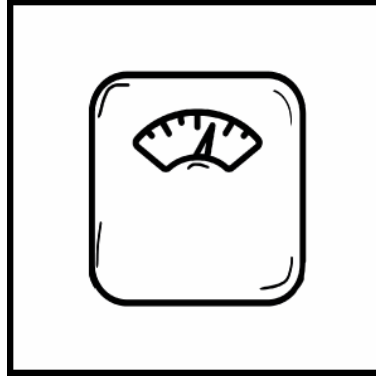
NHS - Fussy Eaters	→	(https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/baby/weaning-and-feeding/fussy-eaters/)
Health For Under 5's - Tackling fussy eating	→	(https://healthforunder5s.co.uk/sections/toddler/happier-mealtimes-fussy-eating/)
Child Feeding Guides	→	(https://www.childfeedingguide.co.uk/parents/)
National Autistic Society - Eating	→	(https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/topics/behaviour/eating)
Child Mind Institute - What is an eating disorder	→	(https://childmind.org/article/when-to-worry-about-an-eating-disorder/)
Beat Eating Disorders	→	(https://www.beateatingdisorders.org.uk/)
St John's Ambulance Baby Choking	→	(https://www.sja.org.uk/get-advice/first-aid-advice/choking/baby-choking/)

Other Useful Pages



Eat Better

[\(/healthy-lifestyles/eat-better/\)](#)



Healthy Weight in Pregnancy

[\(/pregnancy-early-days/having-a-baby/healthy-weight-in-pregnancy/\)](#)



Tips for Making Healthy Changes

[\(/healthy-lifestyles/making-change/tips-for-making-healthy-changes/\)](#)



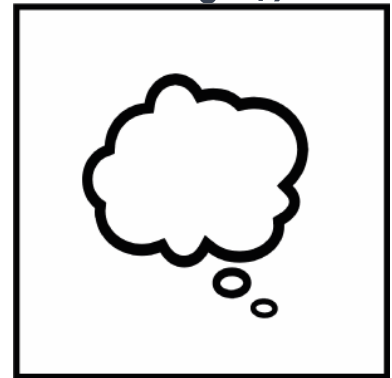
Move More

[\(/healthy-lifestyles/move-more/\)](#)



Getting Into A Routine

[\(/child-development-additional-needs/supporting-development/getting-into-a-routine/\)](#)



Understanding Your Child's Behaviour

[\(/child-development-additional-needs/behaviour-sleep/understanding-your-child-s-behaviour/\)](#)

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