



Feeding the under 3s  
the food they need

# How to manage your toddler's fussy eating: things that help

## Guidance & Tips for Parents

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FUSSY EATING:  
THINGS TO AVOID



FUSSY EATING:  
THINGS THAT HELP



Do	Reason
Eat with your child as often as possible.	Toddlers learn by copying their parents and other children.
Develop a daily routine of three meals and two to three snacks around your toddler's sleeping pattern.	Toddlers don't eat well if they become over hungry or very tired.
Offer two courses at meals: one savoury course followed by a sweet course.	This gives two opportunities for the toddler to take in the calories and nutrients needed and offers a wider variety of foods. It also makes the meal more interesting.
Praise toddlers when they eat well.	Toddlers respond positively to praise.
Make positive comments about the food.	Parents and carers are strong role models. If you make positive comments about foods, toddlers will be more willing to try them.
Always offer something you know your child will eat at each meal. In addition offer the foods you and others are eating.	Your child will be able to eat and enjoy some food while having the opportunity to become more familiar with the foods that others are eating but s/he is still wary of.
Arrange for toddlers to eat with other toddlers as often as possible.	Some toddlers eat better when they are with their own age group.
Give small portions. If these are finished, praise the toddler and offer more.	Toddlers can be overwhelmed by large portions and lose their appetite.
Offer finger foods as often as possible.	Toddlers enjoy having the control of feeding themselves with finger foods.
Eat in a calm, relaxed environment without distractions such as TV, games and toys.	Toddlers concentrate on one thing at a time. Distractions make it more difficult to concentrate on eating.
Finish the meal within about 20-30 minutes and accept that after this the toddler is not going to eat any more.	Carrying the meal on for too long is unlikely to result in the toddler eating much more. It is better to wait for the next snack or meal and offer nutritious foods then.
Learn to recognise the signs that your child has had enough, and remove the uneaten food without comment.	Toddlers are saying they have had enough food when they: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• say no</li> <li>• keep their mouth shut when food is offered</li> <li>• turn their head away from food being offered</li> <li>• gag or retch</li> <li>• hold food in their mouth and refuse to swallow it</li> <li>• spit food out repeatedly</li> <li>• cry, shout or scream</li> <li>• push away a spoon, bowl or plate containing food</li> </ul>
Take away uneaten food without comment.	Accept that the toddler has eaten enough.
Involve toddlers in food shopping and preparing for the meal such as putting things on the table.	This will encourage your toddler to have a positive attitude to food.
Involve toddlers in simple cooking and food preparation.	Handling and touching new foods without pressure to eat them will help your toddler become familiar with new foods and more likely to try them.
Involve toddlers in messy play as often as possible during the week. Try and get hands and face messy and sticky.	Toddlers will be more likely to touch food and feed themselves if they are happy with sticky hands and messy faces.
Change the venue of meals. For example, have a picnic outside.	This will make eating and food a fun experience for your toddler and will allow them to see others enjoying food.
Make a list of all the food your child does eat over a week and then review it.	If there are foods from all the food groups and some variety within each group then you can reassure yourself that the problem may not be as bad as you thought.

See **How to manage your toddler's fussy eating: things to avoid** for more guidance.

There are medical reasons why your toddler might not eat. The most common ones are if your toddler is constipated or anaemic. If fussy eating persists and you are still worried about your child's feeding habits, consult your health visitor or GP who will advise you on what help is available.