

HOW TO COPE WHEN YOUR CHILD SHOWS EXTREME FOOD REFUSAL





Infants learn to like foods that they are given in the first year of life. They learn to accept different tastes, and they learn to cope with different textures. As they move into their second year, however, all toddlers start to show a fear of trying new foods. This fear is a normal part of development.

Some children find it very difficult to move through this stage. They are very worried about trying new foods, and may begin to reject many of the foods that they used to accept. These children may also find it difficult getting used to different tastes, smells and food textures. They have an inborn reluctance to move on to taking new foods. They feel safer just eating the few foods that they are used to.

It can be extremely worrying if your toddler constantly refuses to eat anything but a small number of different foods. At this stage, calorie intake is more important than a varied diet. However, there are a number of ways you can improve your child's diet.

GUIDANCE & TIPS FOR PARENTS

	<p>Do</p> <p>Encourage your child to experience different textures through 'messy' play every day. Your toddler may find some textures (like Playdoh) very difficult, so start with textures that they are happy to touch. This may need to be drier consistencies initially such as rice or lentils. Gradually progress to more messy/wet substances allowing them to gain confidence. Have plenty of fun and get messy. If you don't like touching certain textures yourself, or don't feel comfortable allowing your toddler to make a mess, then why not take them to a playgroup in your area.</p> <p>Give small frequent meals of foods that your child accepts.</p> <p>Remember, even children who are extremely fussy eaters usually grow and develop normally, if they are given the foods that they will accept.</p>	<p>Reason</p> <p>Many children who are extreme food refusers are very sensitive to touch on the hands and mouth, and so will not even pick up new foods. Messy play helps them to get used to new textures.</p> <p>Some children become very anxious at mealtimes and are sometimes very slow eaters. Small frequent meals will help them to take in the calories that they need.</p> <p>It is important to keep your child growing well, and these extreme food refusers do grow as we would expect them to if they have enough of the food that they will eat.</p>
	<p>Don't</p> <p>Refuse to give high-energy foods, like ice cream, cakes, biscuits and chocolate, in the hope that your child will eat 'proper' meals and 'healthy' foods.</p> <p>Try to force your child to eat food.</p> <p>Leave long gaps between meals to try to make your child more hungry.</p> <p>Hide new foods inside foods that your child already likes. Your toddler may just stop eating the liked foods.</p>	<p>Reason</p> <p>This is not a good way to get your child to eat new foods, and your child might lose weight if you withhold their safe foods.</p> <p>This will make your child even more anxious at mealtimes, and may cause your child to vomit the food back up.</p> <p>This will make your child less hungry over time, and may lead to weight loss.</p> <p>Some children can very easily detect new tastes and smells, even when hidden in other foods.</p>

If the problem persists see your GP or health visitor who may refer you to:




- a specialist feeding team if one is available in your area
- a clinical psychologist

HOW TO BROADEN YOUR CHILD'S FOOD EXPERIENCE: THE CHILD WITH A LACK OF EXPERIENCE OF DIFFERENT FOODS

Some children haven't had enough experience with solid textured foods in their first year. They may only eat pureed food or 'easy' bite and dissolve foods like Skips or Quavers. Because they have not learnt to move food around in their mouth, they get anxious about food that needs to be chewed. Some toddlers are wary of putting anything with a different texture into their mouth.

There are a number of things that you can do to broaden your child's experience of food textures.

GUIDANCE & TIPS FOR PARENTS

	<p>Do</p> <p>Continue to give the pureed or soft food that your toddler likes.</p> <p>Gradually introduce more 'experiences' of slightly more solid foods. Toddlers only need small amounts of these foods so that they can learn how the food feels in their mouth, and how to move the food around in their mouth.</p>	<p>Reason</p> <p>This will ensure that your child takes the calories needed for growth.</p> <p>This will enable your child to learn the chewing skills needed for more solid textured foods.</p>
	<p>Do</p> <p>Start by introducing bite and dissolve foods.</p> <p>As your toddler begins to accept some bite and dissolve foods, replace one of the spoon-fed pureed meals with bite and dissolve foods.</p> <p>Gradually increase the firmness of the foods offered as your toddler becomes more used to them. Remember though that your toddler will still need some soft textured foods, such as yogurts or fromage frais.</p>	<p>Reason</p> <p>These are foods that quickly dissolve in your mouth if you hold them there; like Quavers, Skips, Wotsits, meringue, and wafer biscuits.</p> <p>This will give your child confidence about having lumps in the mouth; these foods quickly become soft and they are less likely to cause a choke and gag reaction.</p> <p>You need to balance your child's calorie needs with their need to learn new chewing skills.</p> <p>This is to make sure that your child continues to take enough calories to grow.</p>
	<p>Don't</p> <p>Give very difficult solid foods at this stage. Avoid foods like meat, bread and uncooked apple.</p> <p>Worry about dietary balance at this stage.</p>	<p>Reason</p> <p>Your child may not be able to cope with these textures. They may feel that they are choking when they try to swallow these foods, and be fearful of trying more difficult textures in the future.</p> <p>It is more important at this stage to make sure that your child has enough calories to grow well. Dietary balance can come later.</p>

If the problem persists see your GP or health visitor who may refer you to:

- a specialist speech and language therapist for help with the transition to firmer textured food
- the community paediatrician who may be able to identify the cause of your child's inability to cope with firmer textured food

Note contact details for specialists in your area:

Specialist Feeding Clinic:

Child Psychologist:

Speech and Language Therapist:

Paediatric Dietitian:

Paediatrician with interest in feeding difficulties:

Specialist Health Visitor with interest in feeding difficulties:
