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Caring for you, locally

Fussy Eaters

Caring for you, locally



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A Guide for Parents



Does your child turn their nose up at the sight of vegetables?

Screw their face up at brown bread?

Do they pick at their plate and only eat selected foods?

If the answer to the above questions is 'yes', then don't worry because fussy eating is very common amongst children! And in most cases it is just a passing phase that they will eventually grow out of.

It's natural for parents to worry about whether their child is getting enough food, especially if they refuse to eat sometimes. 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, even if it may not seem like it to you.

Feeding the family can be stressful at the best of times and even more so if you have a fussy eater. We do know that children learn by example so if you don't have a healthy diet then chances are your children won't either.

Monitor your child's food and drink intake for a couple of days. You may be pleasantly surprised to find that they are actually eating quite well – for example, some children prefer to 'graze' rather than eat larger meals, but still be eating a reasonable range of foods. Providing 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 favourites, you don't need to worry. Gradually introduce other foods or go back to the foods your child didn't like before and try them again.

Here are some useful tips to help you on your journey!

DO

- ✚ If a child will only eat a few foods, they may not be getting a balanced diet, so it is important to increase the range of things they will eat.
- ✚ Continue to offer favourites, but include something new at each meal time and praise them for trying.
- ✚ Offer nutritious snacks such as fruit, raw vegetables and toast to keep up their energy levels. If your child is low on iron try baked beans, dried

apricots and egg with toast or breakfast cereal. Vitamin C helps with iron absorption, so a glass of fruit juice alongside is a good idea.

- ✚ If your child has become used to being a fussy eater it may take some time to reverse this. Patience is essential! If your child won't eat DON'T get angry and DON'T offer alternatives. Just clear away the plate calmly and start again at the next meal. DO give praise for good eating and for trying something new.
- ✚ Try to eat around the dinner table with your children. Not only will it encourage them to eat it will help them develop social skills.
- ✚ Encourage your child to participate in choosing healthy meals and preparing them together.
- ✚ For older children incentives can work, but it's important not to turn up the heat too high – too much focus on food can backfire. A star chart is one idea- for example, give a star for each new food added to your child's menu and agree some kind of treat after collecting a certain number of stars. A non- food treat is usually best, such as special afternoon or a visit to the toy shop.

DON'T

- ✚ Don't force your child to eat or present uneaten food at the next meal. This is a good way to train dogs, not children!
- ✚ Don't be personally insulted just because they don't like your food.
- ✚ Don't make them sit for long periods at the table.
- ✚ Don't have arguments at meal times.
- ✚ Don't fill up with fluid before meal times. Have water with a meal – Avoid milk or fizzy drinks as this can reduce their appetite.
- ✚ Don't force your child to eat foods that they don't like. This can have a long term impact on their development and will certainly make mealtimes less enjoyable.
- ✚ Don't bribe children. It is a very common mistake to make but avoid at all costs, particularly rewarding children with treat foods such as sweets or biscuits. This is not helpful and should not be seen as a treat.

Don't struggle alone – Contact Calderdale school nursing service for advice and support on: **030 3330 9974**.
