

A young boy with short brown hair is sitting at a wooden table. He is wearing a grey t-shirt and a green bib. His hands are clasped together on the table, and he has a sad or frustrated expression on his face. In front of him is a white plate with several slices of cantaloupe. The plate is on a green and brown patterned placemat. The background is a bright, out-of-focus window with white curtains.

# Fussy Eating: Supporting Your Child

The logo for Growing Well Growing Healthy (GWGH) is located in the bottom left corner. It features the letters 'GWGH' in a colorful, rounded font, with 'G' in green, 'W' in yellow, 'G' in red, and 'H' in blue. The logo is set against a white cloud-like shape with a teal border.

**GWGH**

Growing Well Growing Healthy

A yellow speech bubble with a tail pointing towards the bottom right. Inside the bubble, the text "What is Fussy Eating?" is written in a bold, dark grey font.

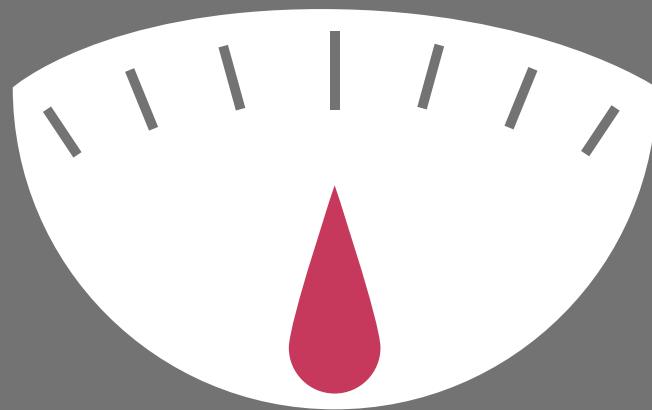
**What is Fussy Eating?**

# What is Fussy Eating?

Fussy eating can often be a common part of normal development. Most children go through phases of refusing to eat certain foods. This can be particularly common in young children but it can occur at any age.

From a young age (around 1 year old) children start to become more aware of how their food looks, smells and tastes and can become suspicious of foods that are different in some way to what they expect.





Fussy eating doesn't always mean that your child is underweight or that your child is unhealthy.

Your child could be a fussy eater and still take enough calories and nutrition to be healthy and grow.

It is important to know that children will generally eat what they need to fuel their growth and development.

They will often regulate this week to week depending on what their body needs. They may eat more some days than others especially during growth spurts.

We must also consider that everyone needs different amounts of food depending on the needs of their own body.

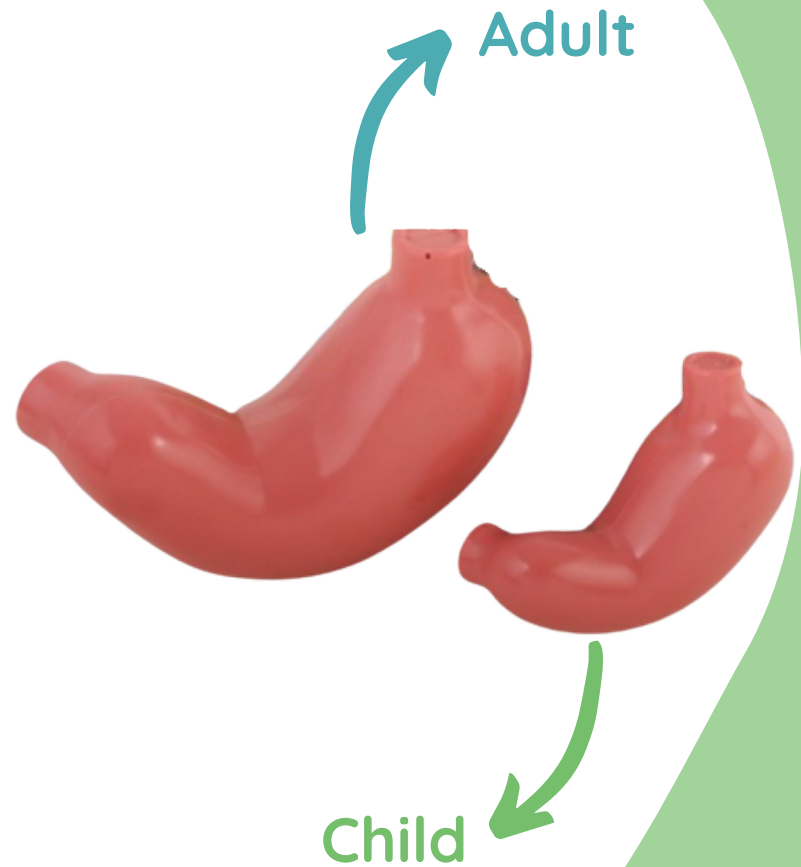


# Stomach Sizes

Children have smaller stomach than adults therefore they need to eat smaller portions of food.

Most children will know when they are full or hungry, so try to encourage your child to eat to their own appetite and avoid forcing them to eat.

Remember every child is different so don't compare their eating to other children or siblings!

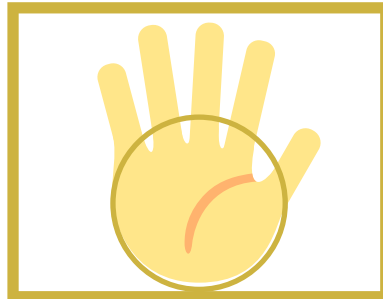


# How Much Should My Child Eat?

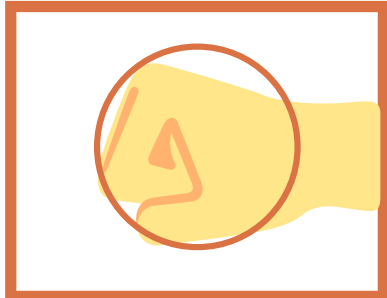
Carbohydrates



Protein



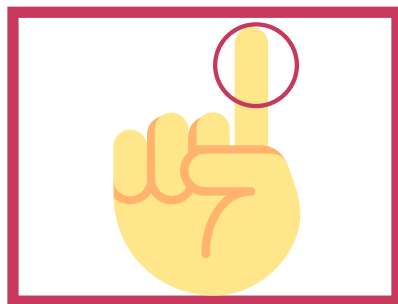
Fruit



Vegetables



Fats



You can use your child's own hand as a guide to know whether or not they are eating the right amounts of food for their body.



For many children, fussy eating is usually a temporary phase that can be overcome with patience and support at home.

Some children however may experience more persistent and complex eating restrictions which may require specialist support.





Severe  
Constipation

Nutritional  
Deficiencies

Dehydration

Growth  
Problems

Severe Dental  
Decay

If your child's eating is affecting their health or growth,  
seek further support from your GP who can refer you to  
appropriate services

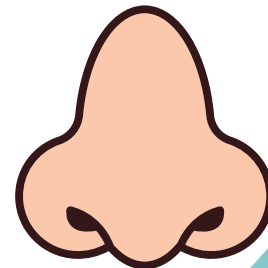
## Why Does Fussy Eating Occur?



There are several different reasons behind why fussy or picky eating habits occur

From around age 1 year through to school age, children start to become more aware of their food and how it looks, smells and tastes. This can make children become suspicious of foods that are different in some way to what they expect.

This can lead to rejecting unfamiliar foods and sometimes stop eating foods they used to enjoy



# Younger Children

Physical  
discomfort  
such as  
constipation

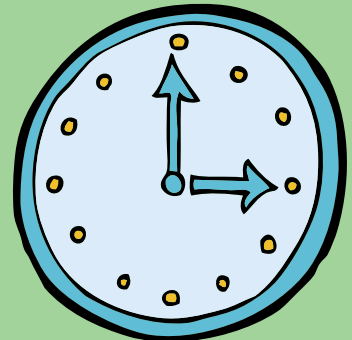
Food  
phobias

Sensory  
difficulties

Given too  
much  
attention for  
not eating

Unfamiliar  
foods

Change in  
routine



# Older Children

Food intake in older children is often dependant on learned responses

Older children are more likely to model the behaviours of their friends, peers or family members

They may want to eat what others eat or eat when others eat regardless of whether they are hungry or not

As children start puberty at around 8/9 years old, their eating habits can change which is normal

Older children tend to snack more, skip meals and show interest in new foods. They may even reject foods they used to enjoy.

# Supporting Your Child



When supporting your child to increase the number and variety of different foods they will eat, there are a number of different techniques you can try.

Each child is unique and will respond differently to techniques. This may require you to try out a number of different methods but try to persevere!

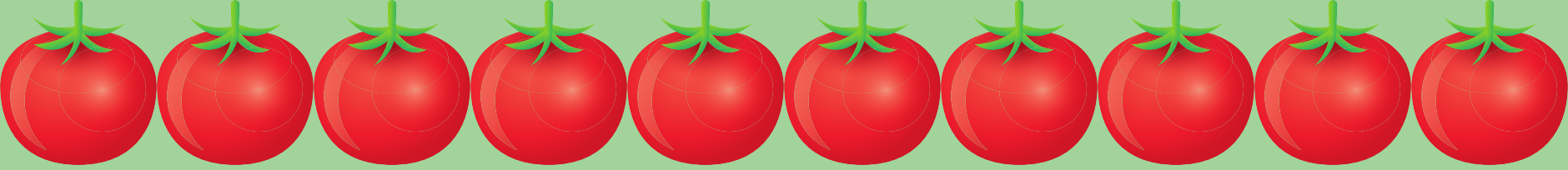


NEW

## Introducing New Foods

- Introduce new foods gradually to help desensitise your child to the smell, look and taste
- It is often useful to introduced new foods alongside safety foods.
- It can also be useful to introduce foods that are similar to foods that are already accepted.
- Children wont want to try foods they've never seen before so try to introduce a range of foods through pictures, books and games



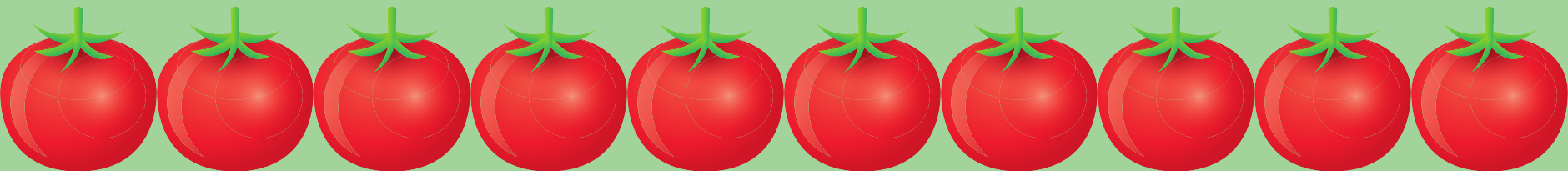


## Keep Trying!

Sometimes children need to try new foods up to 20 times before they start to before they become accepted.

This can include a process of smelling, touching or licking items of food before becoming confident enough to try it.

For these reasons it is important to reintroduce foods that have been previously been refused



# Make Food Fun!

Food acceptability is not always about eating the food, sometimes its just about learning to be comfortable with it.



Encourage your child to have fun with food through play and learning. Try to include food in play activities away from meal times to increase food familiarity.

When using foods for play, make sure that they are edible and are of appropriate texture in case your child feels brave enough to try the food!



Messy  
Play

Theme  
Nights

Make Pictures  
or Faces with  
Food

Look at cookery  
books together and  
pick out new meals  
to try

Make  
personalised  
place mats

Teddy Bears  
Picnic

Encourage your child  
to get involved with  
cooking/preparing  
meals

Blind taste  
test



# Activity Idea

- Make meal times a fun experience by using an activity jar to decide what you're going to eat!
- Write different meal ideas on small pieces of paper then fold them up and put them into a box or jar.
- At the start of the week pick out your 5-7 pieces of paper and those are your meals for the week!
- This fun activity can help to reduce some of the anxiety your child may feel about choosing what to eat



# Meal Time Routine

Most children prefer structured and predictable routines. If a child is feeling anxious about eating, then having a set routine can help to make the situation more controlled which for many children can help to reduce anxiety. A routine helps the child to understand what to expect.



In a 24 hour period try to stick to 5 opportunities to eat (3 meals and 2 snacks)



Do not rush your child but try to limit meal times to around 30 minutes



Drinks can fill up your child- so don't offer them for about 30 minutes before a meal

Try to keep meal times to a similar time each day to help your child to regulate their appetite

Avoid allowing your child to graze through the day





Try to spend meal times together whether this be around a table or sat on the floor with a picnic!



# Make Meals Fun!

Eat with your child to lead by example

Avoid distractions such as the TV or tablets

Prepare food together

Try to keep meal times as calm and relaxed as possible

Offer praise for positive meal time behaviours

Use a reward chart to motivate positive food behaviours

# Be Positive!

If you are feeling anxious or unhappy about your child's eating habits, your child is likely to pick up on this which can increase their own anxiety and make mealtimes more difficult.

Children mirror their parents feelings whether they are happy or sad so try to show positive emotions around meal times





A graphic of a spiral-bound notebook with a white page and a dark grey cover. The spiral binding is at the top. The page contains the text 'TOP TIPS' and a list of five bullet points.

## TOP TIPS

- Introduce new strategies one or two at a time and give them chance to become established routines
- Keep advice and routines consistent across all care givers
- Do not force your child to eat as this can increase anxiety around food and meal times
- Try not to use food as a method of reward
- Be mindful of the language you use around food and avoid branding certain foods as good or bad