



Toddler Nutrition



Solving a complex problem at work, finally achieving a personal goal is nothing compared to your child finishing a whole plate of food. Isn't it amazing that no matter how big your accomplishments in your day, NOTHING, absolutely nothing compares to the satisfaction you get watching your toddler successfully finish a meal. You can sleep peacefully knowing your baby has eaten 'well'!

Having a fussy eater is more common than you may think. While some babies eat almost anything they can get their little hands on, other babies are a lot pickier. Some fussy eaters are simply trying to express their independence with a say in what, when, where and how they eat. Others just need some coaxing, distraction and gentle encouragement. Perhaps your family dinner table has become a battleground? Then it is time to take the stress out of mealtimes with your toddler and child, end the arguments over food, and feed your fussy eaters.

There is nothing like a food battle to cause stress and anxiety in parents – take heart and remember fussy eating isn't just common, it's normal!

Understanding your child

A classic time for problems to arise is when your baby is 12 months old. As a child is more aware of the world his natural instincts make him more suspicious of new foods. Nature's way of protecting us from eating food that is potentially harmful. If you're one of the lucky parents that sailed through weaning, another common time for problems to arise is during the challenging 2's. Having lulled you into a false sense of security, your toddler could wake one morning with dietary requirements that even a top chef would struggle to meet.

Children's appetites are affected by growth cycles and they have different taste preferences to adults. You will encourage her appetite to work properly if you give her more when she's hungry and let her eat less when she's not interested. Growth slows down and appetites fluctuate between one and five years of age. Studies have shown that most children get plenty to eat even if it seems like they are barely eating at all.

Try looking at mealtimes from a child's perspective. Toddlers have a different agenda: from their point of view, eating is a waste of their playing time, and if we make mealtimes boring by nagging, it's even worse!

Some practical tips

Here are some tips to help your little fussy eater learn to eat better, while giving you some peace of mind.

Put your mind at rest:

If you are concerned about the health of your child, take her for a check up at the doctor to rule out any potential health problems.

Keep a food diary for 2 weeks and record EVERYTHING that she eats and drinks (include quantities). You can then get this assessed by a health professional to assess adequate nutritional intake.

Give an appropriate vitamin & mineral supplement during the fussy eating phase.

Stay off the battle field:

Remember picky eating can also be a child's way of asserting his independence and may have less to do with the actual food than his need to push the limits of your authority and assert some control over his life. This is why pressurizing a child to eat often backfires and you become a 'casualty of war'.

Wean at the appropriate age:

Weaning late has shown some link to fussing eating. Parents who delay introducing their babies to chewy food and a variety of tastes could find their babies grow up developing food fads.

A recent study showed that babies should be introduced to a more varied diet between the ages of 6 to 9 months to decrease the risk of becoming fussy eaters.

Babies learning to eat will spit food out, and this is more than likely due to a 'tongue-reflex' action than a sign that your baby doesn't like the food. Keep trying with that food and soon he will get used to it and swallow.

Fun food presentation:

Sandwiches cut into moon shapes, cracker with a smiley face, carrot sticks as soldiers and apple boats can make food presentation more enticing.

Presenting meals as a smorgasbord from which they can pick and choose from a variety of colours, shapes and textures. Toddlers and young children prefer foods that are identifiable and not one big mush. Using a compartmentalized plate that prevents different foods from touching is a great help.

Make mealtimes fun and relaxed:

Use it as an extension of playtime and time when you and your baby can bond uninterrupted (no cell phone calls or sms's !!!). Do puzzles, read a book, tell a story.

Educate:

Talk about the food and its value in simple terms. E.g. this piece of chicken will help your muscles grow strong like daddy (or superman!!) and this carrot will give you beautiful eyes like Cinderella!

Involve your child in food preparation:

By involving your child they will be likely to eat what THEY have made and may eat a bit while preparing their meal.

Empower your child in decision making:

Allow your toddler to choose between two food options. Children are more likely to eat food they have chosen for themselves.

Serve simple, easy to prepare meals:

There is nothing more demoralizing than spending ages cooking a gourmet meal for your baby, who after the first spoonful turns her head away. Prepare easy meals that you know your child likes and should they refuse the food, offer one alternative that is a sure win e.g. Yogurt.

Milk intake:

By the age of one, babies need drink only 500ml of milk daily. Most babies can go onto cow's milk from one years of age unless health reasons dictate otherwise. Do not substitute milk for meals

Social eating:

People are social beings as are our children. Nothing makes a toddler want his food more than having another toddler after his food. Invite a friend over who has a good appetite and watch how your child eats. Children generally eat better at school than at home. Often a toddler will eat more food off daddy's plate than his own plate of food.

Some final tips:

Serve small portions in a fresh and attractive way

Limit drinking before and during meals

Offer new foods when you know your child is hungry and more receptive to new tastes

If your child is playing with his food, quietly remove his plate with no fuss.

And finally, relax, you are doing a great job and statistics have shown that children do not wilfully starve themselves!!!

Questionnaire > 18 months

Serving sizes = size of your toddlers hand

Does my child eat at least 2 - 3 servings of fruit/veg daily or 14 - 21/week

Does my child drink/eat 500ml dairy or dairy substitute/day

Does my child drink +/- 50ml liquid/kg/day in hot weather and 40ml liquid/kg/day in cold weather (milk included)

Does my child eat 10 -14 protein portions/week

Does my child eat 1 - 3 fat portions per day 1 portion = 1 tsp

Does my child eat 4 - 8 starch portions/ day

Do I offer 4 - 6 opportunities to eat with 2 hour breaks

Do I keep pure fruit juice to a maximum of 125ml/day

Does treat foods make up 10% or less of daily intake.

Does my child drink at least a ¼ of his liquid intake as pure water

If you answered 8 – 10 'yes' answers = healthy eater

If you answered 6- 7 'yes' answers = on your way to being a healthy eater, make a few small adjustments

If you answered 5 or less 'yes' = need some assistance, possibly introduce a multivitamin and keep a 14 day nutritional adequacy assessment. Keep a food diary for 14 days. Try some hot tips above.

Some snack ideas:

Remember snacks are part of the daily diet so try and use the snacks as opportunity to incorporate foods from as many of the food groups that you can.

Healthy snacks include food items from all five food groups.

Apples, pears, bananas, carrots, raisins, dried fruits

Brown bread, provitas, crackers, rice cakes, cereal bars

Meatballs, cheese slices, cheese cubes, hard boiled eggs, yogurt

Cookies, cakes, chips and biscuit can be planned into the days menu as one of the snacks.

Remember foods good for general health are usually good for dental health.

Foods suitable as snack foods:

Popcorn

Fresh fruit (see fruit fantastic)

Dried fruit SAD

Plain yogurt with fruit

Flavoured yogurt lollies (you can flavour yogurt with naturlite jam or fruit pulp)

Provitas with cheese

Mini muffins

Mini cheese scones

Brown bread sandwiches with peanut butter

Frozen fruit lollies

Crumpets

Snackers, oatee bars

Pretzels

Pancakes (pancake wheels)

Raw veg

Cubes of cheese with a small bowl of chopped foods

Bread sticks and yogurt dip

Woolworths roasted munch pack

Mini fruit bun

Cherry tomatoes

Suitable drinks:

Water

Unsweetened natural fruit juice diluted 50%

Milk, plain or with tea or flavoured with vanilla essence or honey

Iced tea – Take 4 rooibos tea bags add 1 L boiling water and 250ml clear fruit juice. Place in fridge and use as needed

Milo milk (Milo with oat milk or soy milk is also delicious)

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