

Fussy Eaters

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Sue Atkins – Fussy Eaters

If you suddenly have a fussy eater on your hands - you're not alone! Lots of parents go through the same thing with their children as faddy eating is often a phase that young children go through to explore their independence, test you out and to get some of your attention (no matter how bad it is!)

Children like things to be familiar, as it helps them relax and feel safe so whether it's their bedtime routine or their cheese sandwich, many children won't try new foods until they've been exposed to them several times. So just bear that in mind when you are offering some new foods to your toddler as it helps you relax!

Toddlers pick up on your vibes all the time so if you suddenly become anxious around food time and start to tense up around the table – guess what... your child does too and frustrating though it is, staying calm, centred, positive and relaxed is often all it takes to go with the flow of this phase and survive it!

Many parents I coach worry that their children are not getting the nutrients they need to thrive and stay healthy, and they react by putting a lot of pressure on their toddler to eat more, eat less, or eat the right kinds of food but this approach often makes the problem worse by creating power struggles between you and your little one.

So, make up your mind to change this pattern straight away and to start to look at the bigger picture to what you want to teach your toddler about food long term and for a healthy life.

Ask yourself:

What do I want my child to feel around food when they are a teenager?

How can I empower my toddler and celebrate their striving for independence around food?

How can I relax and teach them to have a lifetime of good health and a healthy relationship with food by only offering two healthy choices from now on and relaxing if they don't eat much at each meal?

How can I, by, eliminating coaxing, bribing, and disguising food as a way to “trick” my little one into healthy habits as this only reinforces an unhealthy relationship with food?

How can I take the battle out of meal times and make food more fun?

Start to notice how much food your child normally needs to remain healthy as this is the key to ending the battles around meal time. Think of their food intake over a week rather than a day as it is probably better than you think.

Once you understand the portion sizes your child needs to thrive, you can offer nourishing snacks and feel relaxed knowing that your toddler is meeting his or her nutritional requirements that's right for them. It will stop you comparing and worrying what other kids are doing which frees you up to trust your child's natural rhythm and food patterns!

The good news is that once you've embraced this mindset and this simple strategy, your child will love their newfound sense of responsibility, which will take the stress out of meal times and end the food fight forever, well it will certainly reduce the battles!

Here are some practical tips to help you keep your sanity and get your child's diet back on track.

- Provide a variety of healthy food for your child to eat at each meal.

Sue Atkins – Fussy Eaters

- Keep in mind that it takes multiple exposures to a new food for a child to see it as familiar and OK to try. In fact, it takes 11 times for your child to have a food sometimes before they will have a go.....
- So, be patient. When you do offer a new food, simply place it on the dinner table with everything else, and don't make a big fuss about it. Eventually, after your little one has seen the family eating the food a few times, they will feel more open to trying it themselves.
- Relax at mealtimes.
- Notice your language around meal time - if you say, "Its dinnertime. What do you want to eat?" your child will probably choose something familiar to them and you are handing them all the power so try saying , 'Here's dinner' and just smile and relax.
- When introducing new foods, offer just one or two, and present them in small quantities.
- Just give your toddler a taste before putting a whole serving on their plate so they don't feel overwhelmed - and it won't seem like a waste of food to you.
- Whenever possible, let your child be involved in some food decisions.
- Limited choices are great for fussy eaters as this gives them a sense of control over their diet and they'll be far more likely to eat something that they've chosen for themselves . (This works best if you let your child choose from a small selection of healthy foods you've already picked out!)
- So have fun taking your toddler shopping or making their lunch.
- As your child's world expands and they begin to go to a playgroup or nursery, their taste in foods often broadens as well. They see other children eating new and exciting different things and this is often enough to inspire them to eat new things, too.
- Remember some children's palates are more sensitive than others.
- They simply won't like the texture, colour, or taste of some foods. This is why a child will often claim to dislike a food they have never even tried.
- Likewise, some children may have an aversion to a food because it reminds them of a time when they were sick or has some other negative association.
- If your child complains that a particular food will make him ill, stop offering that food for a while. You can always try again when your child is a little older. (You can always tap out that stressful experience later (See Lesson 20 about EFT and Tapping)
- Get the fork to talk and make food time fun. Get the fork to talk and say "Hello, can I help your lunch go in your tummy please?" Or play airplanes with it zooming in the food with all the full-on noises of a plane landing at Gatwick!
- Have tea or a meal with another child who is a good eater and don't criticise your child but be amazed and delighted by the other child "Wow X you are such a good eater."
- Sing some fun songs as you sit at the table or play their favourite music as it relaxes you all and makes meal time enjoyable.
- Get teddy to join in – one for teddy – one for you.
- If mealtimes are becoming a misery or a battle ground then change where you eat. Have tea in a tent or at a small table on tiny chairs with all their toys coming along too or have a car picnic – get creative and change the atmosphere.
- Add new things S-L-O-W-L-Y. Take a basic food that they love like bread and add new things to it bit by bit. Try bread with some cheese then bread with scrambled eggs or bread with a boiled egg and soldiers, or bread with ham or jam – have fun experimenting – it takes the pressure off.
- Chop things up really small as little fingers love exploring and don't feel overwhelmed by large amounts.
- Hiding goodness in sauces. Putting healthy vegetables into sauces often works a treat too.
- Leave a fruit bowl full of colourful fruit in a place where hungry children can help themselves (and deliberately hide the biscuits away).
- Change your meal times to later so your child is hungrier.
- Keep off the snacks and sweets in between meals.
- Play shops, restaurants and cafes with your toddler and get them helping to prepare the food – washing fruit or vegetables, mixing, kneading, carrying unbreakables and then let them taste testing what they have made.
- Make mealtime a family time where you all sit down, chat, share, laugh and relax together and your toddler will relax too and enjoy the sociability of the family spending time eating together.
- Remember no child can like everything and we are all different.

Sue Atkins – Fussy Eaters

- Remember children who are ill go off their food so offer plenty to drink and take them to the doctor if you are worried.
- Remember if your little one is worried about anything like going to a new playgroup or having a new child minder, they may go off their food.
- Your child has an innate sense of how much food their body needs to grow and be healthy, so the best thing you can do is to provide a wide variety of healthy foods in a positive, relaxed environment so that mealtimes will be enjoyable for everyone involved.
- Keep in touch with your health visitor if you're concerned, but don't pass on your fears to your child. If you're constantly hovering over them at mealtime, nagging cajoling, and worrying about what they are eating, they are likely to become even more resistant to eating.
- Just continue to offer a variety of healthy foods without making a big fuss and trust your child to eat what they need.

I have created a “A Food Diary” to help you relax as you keep a record of the food your child is eating over the course of a whole week!

This daily diary will help you to plan your child's diet, ensuring that they get just the right amount of proteins, vitamins, and carbohydrates that are so important.

To download my free “Food Diary” go to:

<https://sueatkinsparentingcoach.com/resources/>

Sue Atkins – Fussy Eaters

How to introduce new foods to fussy eaters - checklist

If you have a fussy eater who doesn't like trying new food, here are some tips that might help:

- Put a small amount of new food on the plate with familiar food your child already likes – for example, peas alongside some mashed potato. Encourage your child to touch, smell or take a lick of the new food.
- Make food attractive. Think colour & shape. Offer your child a variety of different colours, shapes and sizes and let your child choose what they eat from their plate. No judgement, coaxing or nagging!
- Keep offering previously refused foods. Your child will probably try it and eventually like it – but they might have to see a food on their plate 10-15 times before they even try a taste.
- When possible, look for opportunities for your child to share meals and snacks with other children – invite friends or family round to play & eat. Your child might be more willing to try a food if other children are tucking in.
- Serve your child the same meal the family is eating but in a portion size your child will eat. Often, we give children too large a portion and it overwhelms them. If your child doesn't eat it, say something like, 'Try it, it's really yummy'. If they still don't want it, calmly say, 'OK, we'll try it another time when you're hungry'. Stay relaxed, upbeat, positive and chilled. Don't make food an issue. But remember not to add salt or sugar to your child's food.
- Offer different foods from each of the five good food groups. For example, if your child doesn't like cheese, they might enjoy yoghurt instead. If they don't like melon try strawberries instead.
- Try not to let your child fill up on drinks before introducing new foods. They're more likely to try the food if they are hungry and don't have the option of something else to eat or drink.
- Your child may be a slow eater, so be patient.
- Don't give your child too many snacks between meals – 2 healthy snacks a day is plenty.
- As long as your child eats some food from the 4 main food groups regularly (fruit and vegetables; potatoes, bread, rice, pasta and other starchy carbohydrates; dairy or dairy alternatives; and beans, pulses, fish, eggs, meat and other proteins) you don't need to worry.
- The best way for your child to learn to eat and enjoy new foods is to copy you. Try to eat with them as often as you can.
- Give small portions and praise your child for eating, even if they only eat a little.
- It's best not to use food as a reward. Your child may start to think of sweets as nice and vegetables as nasty. Instead, reward them with a trip to the park or promise to play a game with them.
- Ask an adult that your child likes and looks up to eat with you. Sometimes a child will eat for someone else, such as a grandparent, without any fuss.
- Changing how you serve a food may make it more appealing. For example, your child might refuse cooked carrots but enjoy raw grated carrot or dunking a raw carrot into humous.