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Acknowledgement of Country

Goodstart Early Learning acknowledges all Traditional Custodians across Australia and recognises First Nations peoples' continued cultural and spiritual connection to the land, sky and waterways that surround us. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

Reconciliation and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives are woven through our work with children.

Our Safety commitment

Safety starts with each of us – but at Goodstart it is more than that. Being safe is who we are and what we do.

It's part of being a Goodstarter.

Fussy Eating and making mealtimes fun!

By Flinders University Student Speech Pathologists
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Fussy eating can be stressful for families. This brochure aims to provide families' with strategies to implement at home for introducing new foods and making mealtimes fun!



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What is the evidence-base behind fussy eating?

Establishing healthy eating habits in childhood promotes a child's exposure to a variety of nutritional foods, and reduce later risk of obesity.

Why are some children 'fussy eaters'?

- Sensory sensitivity (e.g. Autism Spectrum Disorder).
- Learnt aversions due to negative feeding experiences (e.g. choking or reflux).
- Anxiety associated with food allergies.

A fussy eater's diet may look like:

- Limited dietary variety
- Lower intake of fruits & vegetables
- Lower intake of meats & fish
- Lower intake of vitamins & minerals
- Higher intakes of savoury snacks/sweets
- Higher energy intake from sugary drinks

Unwinding common myths

MYTH: "Children shouldn't play with their food"

FACT: The more familiar children are with the smell and feel of new foods, the more likely they are to try eating them.

MYTH: "Nothing can be done about fussy eating"

FACT: There are a number of tips and strategies that can be used to help children and their families.

MYTH: "Not wanting to eat new foods is a sign of fussy eating"

FACT: Rejecting unfamiliar foods is a normal phase for most children (however, continuing to reject well known foods may be a sign of fussy eating).

MYTH: "Fussy eating is not common"

FACT: In Australia, up to 50% of 2 year-olds and 21% of 3-5 year-olds are fussy eaters.

What is fussy eating?

"Fussy eaters are children who reject large quantities of both familiar and unfamiliar foods which results in a habitual diet characterised by the consumption of a low variety of food" (Levene & Williams, 2018).

What are the characteristics of a fussy eater?

- Unwillingness to eat familiar foods
- Unwillingness to try new foods
- Strong food preferences
- Sensitivity to food textures, aromas & colours
- May dislike their foods mixed or touching
- Lengthy meal times
- Distracted during meal times



Strategies for introducing new foods

- Select one new food at a time. Start with a food that is like an accepted food, e.g. an apple and a pear!
- **Gradually introducing new appearances, flavours, and textures increases your child's confidence to try out new foods before moving to more challenging foods!**
- Encourage exploration of appearance, texture and smell!
- **Playing with food is encouraged to reduce anxiety in children and create a positive mealtime environment.**
- Eat new foods with your children and make mealtimes sociable!
- **Children feel more willing to try new foods if they're parents are eating and enjoying it too!**
- Don't give up – continue to present your child with foods they dislike!
- **It may take a child up to 15 positive experiences to accept a new food!**
- Create a predictable mealtime routine!
- **Try things like eating together at the table regularly, reducing distractions and background noise, and involving your child in setting the table and packing away. This aims to build routine!**

Positive language for positive mealtimes

Try to avoid using language that punishes or puts pressure on your child to eat. Instead, you could:

Use positive language such as, "You are learning to like this food!" **or** "Maybe you will like this food tomorrow!"

Use child-focused language: "Eating your beans can give you lots of energy for playing!"

Narrate your child's actions: "I can see you are looking at the carrots" **or** "You're licking the potato!"

