

‘Faddy eating’ - tips for parents and carers

What to do and why

- Enjoy meals together as often as possible – toddlers learn by copying adults and other children
- Develop a daily routine of three meals and two to three snacks around your toddler’s sleeping pattern - toddlers don’t eat very well if they become over hungry or tired
- Offer two courses at meals: one savoury course followed by a sweet course - this gives two opportunities for the toddler to take in the calories and nutrients needed and offers a wider variety of foods. It also makes the meal more interesting
- Praise toddlers when they eat well – toddlers respond positively to praise
- Make positive comments about food – parents and carers are strong role models. If you make positive comments about foods, toddlers will be more willing to try them
- Arrange for toddlers to eat with other toddlers as often as possible - some toddlers eat better when they are with their own age group
- Give small portions. If these are finished, praise the toddler and offer more - toddlers can be overwhelmed by large portions and lose their appetite
- Offer finger foods as often as possible – toddlers enjoy having the control of feeding themselves with finger foods
- Eat in a calm, relaxed environment without distractions such as TV, games and toys - toddlers concentrate on one thing at a time so distractions make it more difficult to concentrate on eating
- Finish the meal within 20-30 minutes and accept that after this the toddler is not going to eat any more – if the meal goes on for too long this is unlikely to result in the toddler eating much more. It is better to wait for the next snack or meal and offer nutritious foods then
- Learn to recognise the signs that your child has had enough, and remove uneaten food without comment. Toddlers are saying they have had enough food when they:
 - Say ‘no’
 - Keep their mouth shut/ turn their head away when food is offered
 - Push away a spoon, bowl or plate containing food
 - Hold food in their mouth and refuse to swallow it
 - Spit food out repeatedly
 - Cry, shout or scream
 - Gag or retch.
- Take away uneaten food without comment – accept that the toddler has eaten enough
- Involve toddlers in food shopping and preparing for the meal such as putting things on the table as this will encourage your toddler to have a positive attitude to food.
- Encourage children to get messy with food – handling and touching new foods without pressure to eat them will help your toddler become familiar with new foods and more likely to try them

- Change where you eat meals. For example, have a picnic outside – this will make eating food a fun experience for your toddler and will allow them to see others enjoying food
- Make a list of all the food your child does eat over a week and then review it – if they eat eating foods from all the food groups and some variety within each group then you can reassure yourself that the problem may not be as bad as you thought.

What not to do and why

- Don't rush a meal – some toddlers eat slowly and rushing a toddler to eat can reduce their appetite
- Don't insist your toddler finishes everything on his/her plate or pressure a toddler to eat more when he/she has indicated to you they have had enough – toddlers should be allowed to eat to their appetite and parents and carers should respect this
- Don't take away a refused meal and offer a completely different one in its place – a toddler will soon take advantage if you do this. In the long run it is better to offer family meals and accept your child will prefer some foods to others. Always try to offer one food at each meal that you know they will eat
- Don't offer a sweet course as a reward – you will make the sweet course seem more desirable
- Don't offer large drinks of milk, squash or fruit juice within an hour of the meal – large drinks will reduce your toddler's appetite. Give water instead
- Don't offer snacks just before a meal – the snacks will stop them feeling hungry
- Don't give a snack very soon after the meal if they haven't eaten the meal – many parents may do this just to ensure their toddler has eaten something. However, it is best to have a set meal plan and wait until the next snack or meal is due before offering food again
- Don't assume that because they have refused a food they will never eat it again – taste changes with time. Some toddlers need to be offered a new food more than 10 times before they feel confident to try it
- Don't feel guilty if one meal turns into a disaster – put it behind you and approach the next meal positively. Parents also learn by making mistakes.