

## 3 TIPS FOR STRESS-FREE MEALTIMES

There are a significant number of parents with stress purely around their child who displays fussy eating behaviours. This could be due to children never eating what's on their plate, over eating junk food or only eating a selection of three different dinners on rotation.

As a parent, this can be very stressful, due to the worry that children aren't getting the nutrients they need to grow strong and healthy. On the other hand the child can become frustrated by the ongoing pressure to eat. It can create a storm, but it doesn't need to be like this.

Some advice to parents is to pick your battles! Some battles are just too big and should be avoided. But that's easier said than done.

Here are 3 tips to help your children thrive, even if they're fussy eaters.

### 1 You provide, they decide<sup>1</sup>

It's your job is to choose and prepare the food, provide regular mealtimes and snacks, and make eating times pleasant and calm. Your child's job is to eat the amount they need, choose what they eat from your offerings and learn to behave well at mealtimes. It is best to offer children their preferred foods regularly rather than trying to make them eat new foods too often. Give them a daily mixture of foods they know and enjoy along with small amounts of 'test foods' that they are still learning to accept.

It's important to be patient as it's only between the ages of 6-10 years that children become more relaxed with food and are willing to be more adventurous.



### 2 Eat together<sup>2</sup>

Families tend to be getting busier and more diverse in their activities. This can lead to segregated mealtimes where not everyone is available to eat together. Eating together provides a pause to the day and creates positive feelings around food. Buffet style family mealtimes work well, where food is laid out and each person can choose what to put on their plate. Family mealtimes may not be possible every night, creating a ritual like this every so often enables positive interactions to occur.

When eating together, turn off screens (no phones or television). Traditional face-to-face time is so important in our busy world and helps your child to feel valued.



## 3 Fill in the gaps

Some fussy eaters may need extra nutrition. An Oral Nutritional Supplement (ONS) like PediaSure can be used in this instance to fill in the gaps, especially when a child is too busy, too tired, or too distracted to eat a solid meal.

Using an ONS can give you peace of mind that your child is getting the nutrients they need.<sup>3</sup>

If in doubt, request an appointment with your GP or paediatrician to arrange a thorough review, including assessing their growth and blood tests for specific nutritional deficiencies. Parents are often surprised that their child is still growing adequately despite the perceived lack of nutrients. Despite this, referral to a dietitian for a nutritional assessment is encouraged to prescribe specific vitamins that might be lacking.

Should the problem become worse or more difficult, your doctor or paediatrician may consider a secondary underlying condition such as sensory difficulties, anxiety disorder, a developmental disorder such as Autism or ADHD, or a gastrointestinal disorder such as coeliac disease, which leads to tummy aches. When in doubt, seek an expert opinion.

For additional support for your child, speak to an Accredited Practising Dietitian.

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PediaSure is a Food for Special Medical Purposes. Use under medical supervision.

References: 1. Dietitian Connection. Taking the stress out of feeding fussy eaters – Tips for parents managing fussy eaters. Available at: [https://dietitianconnection.com/app/uploads/2021/06/Fussy-Eaters-Factsheet\\_A4-v6-1.pdf](https://dietitianconnection.com/app/uploads/2021/06/Fussy-Eaters-Factsheet_A4-v6-1.pdf). 2. The Ellyn Satter Institute. Raise a healthy child who is a joy to feed. Available at: <https://www.ellynsatterinstitute.org/how-to-feed/the-division-of-responsibility-in-feeding/>. 3. XXXXX.

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