

Feeding fussy toddlers

Meal times should be enjoyable for the whole family. Toddlers are very independent and know what they like and dislike. Parents and carers can be concerned when their child often refuses food. This page has some tips for feeding fussy toddlers.

What to expect

Toddlers:

- like to explore food—this is how they learn different textures and tastes. Try to accept that this can be messy sometimes
- need a daily routine—this includes eating regularly around the same time each day
- like to watch and imitate people—this is a time to model healthy behaviours and sit and eat the same foods with your toddler
- will not always eat the same amount every day—this depends on growth spurts and their physical activity each day
- know when they are hungry and want to stop eating.

How to help your child eat a healthy diet

These tips may help you if you are finding it hard to feed your toddler:

- Try varying the texture, colours, shapes and type of food offered to your child. This can encourage children to explore and try the food.
- Think of ways you can involve your child in buying and preparing meals and snacks. This can get them excited about food.
- Try to be patient when food is refused. Children may need to be offered foods 6 to 10 times before they taste it.
- Forcing your child to eat can make them enjoy meal times less. Just like adults, children have likes and dislikes. Offer them some choice in choosing foods (e.g. between 2 sandwich fillings).
- Using food as a bribe or offering other unhealthy foods when they refuse can lead to unhealthy habits. Trust that your child will eat when they are hungry.
- Be consistent with how you handle food refusal.
- Remember that children's appetites can change each day. Use your child's growth as a guide that they are eating enough.
- Limit drinks or snacks within 1 hour of meal times. This can fill them up too much before the meal.
- Consider serving new foods together with a favourite food.
- Keep meal times calm and limit distractions such as TV, toys or games.
- Eat with your child at meal times and show them that you enjoy eating healthy foods too. Children learn by watching the people around them.

More information

Talk to your doctor or child health service if you are concerned about your child's growth or how much they are eating. They can offer help or refer you to a health professional for assistance.

Resources for parents, families and carers

Brochure: [Healthy eating for children](https://www.eatforhealth.gov.au/sites/default/files/files/the_guidelines/n55f_children_brochure.pdf) (https://www.eatforhealth.gov.au/sites/default/files/files/the_guidelines/n55f_children_brochure.pdf), Australian Government

Booklet: [Caring for children—Birth to five years](http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/health/Publications/caring-for-children-manual.pdf) (<http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/health/Publications/caring-for-children-manual.pdf>), New South Wales Health

Booklet: Guide to foods—baby's first year, Victoria Government

Related content

[Introducing complementary foods: Feeding from 12 months](http://conditions.health.qld.gov.au/HealthCondition/condition/8/78/409/introducing-solids-feeding-from-12-months)
(<http://conditions.health.qld.gov.au/HealthCondition/condition/8/78/409/introducing-solids-feeding-from-12-months>)

[Fun not Fuss with Food: Managing behaviour](http://conditions.health.qld.gov.au/HealthCondition/condition/8/78/58/fun-not-fuss-with-food-managing-behaviour)
(<http://conditions.health.qld.gov.au/HealthCondition/condition/8/78/58/fun-not-fuss-with-food-managing-behaviour>)

[Fun not Fuss with Food: Child-friendly meals](http://conditions.health.qld.gov.au/HealthCondition/condition/8/78/50/fun-not-fuss-with-food-child-friendly-meals)
(<http://conditions.health.qld.gov.au/HealthCondition/condition/8/78/50/fun-not-fuss-with-food-child-friendly-meals>)

[Fun not Fuss with Food: Five-step plan to achieving your goals](http://conditions.health.qld.gov.au/HealthCondition/condition/8/78/51/fun-not-fuss-with-food-five-step-plan-to-achi)
(<http://conditions.health.qld.gov.au/HealthCondition/condition/8/78/51/fun-not-fuss-with-food-five-step-plan-to-achi>)

URL: <http://conditions.health.qld.gov.au/HealthCondition/condition/8/78/316/feeding-fussy-toddlers>

Version number: 8

Date published: 18/06/2019

Date generated: 25/10/2021

[Fun not Fuss with Food: Frequently asked questions](http://conditions.health.qld.gov.au/HealthCondition/condition/8/78/53/fun-not-fuss-with-food-frequently-asked-quest)

(<http://conditions.health.qld.gov.au/HealthCondition/condition/8/78/53/fun-not-fuss-with-food-frequently-asked-quest>)

Acknowledgements

Information on this fact sheet is drawn from:

- Children's Health Queensland Hospital and Health Service 2015, *Child health information: Your guide to the first 12 months*.

This fact sheet is also the result of input and effort from many health professionals in Queensland. Their assistance with the content is greatly appreciated.

This information is provided as general information only and should not be relied upon as professional or medical advice. Professional and medical advice should be sought for particular health concerns or events. Best efforts have been used to develop this information, which is considered correct and current in accordance with accepted best practice in Queensland as at the date of production. The State of Queensland (Queensland Health) does not accept liability to any person for the information provided in this fact sheet nor does it warrant that the information will remain correct and current. The State of Queensland (Queensland Health) does not promote, endorse or create any association with any third party by publication or use of any references or terminology in this fact sheet.