

CUBS PAEDIATRIC DIETETICS - SELECTIVE EATING



Tips and Tricks

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GENERAL TREATMENT STRATEGIES



Division of responsibility:

The division of responsibility is all about recognising what roles during meals parents have and what rules your children have. If we can learn to 'stick to our lanes', so to speak, and trust that your child can manage this role then we will create peaceful mealtimes.

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Parent roles:

- What - Parents should be choosing what their child eats (not what we think they will eat). This will stop children from boxing themselves in and eating the same foods over and over which leads to excluding foods. Pretend your child does not have a sense of preference.

- When - eating every 2-3 hours will create appetite so then they are more hungry. Appetite is a big driver for wanting to eat more volume and increased desire to try new foods (as they will be hungrier).

Children's roles:

- If your child wants to eat the food at all - this means once parents have placed foods on the table your job is done. It is now the child's turn to choose if they want to eat. Giving them this option will improve their independence and contentment with mealtimes.

- and how much they want to eat - this means allowing them to eat freely at mealtimes. Let it be their decision to choose how much to eat. Do not ask them to eat 'one more bite' or 'if you eat more of this you will get dessert'

When parents and children step into each others designated roles you get power struggles for independence. This creates tension and poor trust. The more you give your child independence during mealtimes the easier things become.



SELECTIVE EATING STRATEGIES

1) **Self Serving:** The new rule is that everyone at the table has to self serve themselves and they have to pick something up from all components of the meal (e.g. steal/ potato/ salad). But it is your child's choice if they want to try and how much they eat of each component.

2) But **remember the 10 times rule** - you have to try foods at least 10 times before you can decide if you like it or not. So they can be encouraged to take a bite but then they can decide if they want more or none at all. Encouraging 10 times rule is appropriate.

3) **Picnic style meals** - They self serve themselves, but they have to try all foods offered on the table onto the plate. The parents job is done when foods is on table.

This can apply to all mealtimes. E.g. offer three options at morning and afternoon tea and allow them to eat what they want from your three options. Place two cereals on the table and allow them to choose. Put all the sandwich toppings on the table and let them pick from your options. The idea is that you are actually picking what they eat but they choose from your options.

To combine your family meal with your child's preferences you may include one plate on the table that your child would eat if you think they would struggle with the meal as a whole. This is the the WHOLE family and not to be given to the child directly.

4) **No more staring at your child during mealtimes** - it is a form of pressure and can increase anxiety and then reduce appetite and increase reluctance to try new foods.

5) **The second plate** - allow your child to have a second plate for all the 'i'm not so sure about this foods' it will reduce anxiety and pressure at the table

6) It is important **not to emphasise any meal or food type**. This can lead to backfiring. I.e. you can have dessert if you eat your vegetables. This really means you need to get through the bad stuff to get to the good stuff. If you are concerned over the volume of food your child takes offer a dessert daily with no strings attached (i.e. no matter how much of dinner they ate)

7) **Food Jaggging:** pretend your child has no sense of preferences. If you always gave them the option to choose between apple and chips they would choose chips. Then they would eat chips so much that they were sick of eating chips and never wanted to look at them again. Then Voila they are eating one less food. It is important to not let your child's diet get monotonous because this can also lead to food refusal and reduced preferred foods. Step 1 would be you choosing what they eat with options. Then each week changing those options with different brands/ colours/ shapes/ flavours. e.g. chips for vegie chips, red apple/ green apple, vitawheats/ rhyvita, arnotts/ woollworths brands etc.

8) **The Chair!** if you child is not well supported at the table they will not feel like eating. They need to be in a 90/90/90 degree support seating. I.e. upright, arms able to rest at waist height at the table and feet have support so they can be flat footed.
makeshift: Non slip mats, pillows, foot rest
Options: Mocka, tripp trapp, seat with changing seat and foot height

Check out my website at www.cubspaediatricdietetics.au for more feeding therapy tips.