



Strategies relating to food

Possible challenge:

Picky eater, limiting self to certain food textures/ temperatures; aversion to sensation around or inside the mouth i.e. in relation to spoon, cup rim, or food texture (may also be intolerant to touch around their face and mouth, difficulty with tooth brushing) frequently hungry, wanting large portions; won't stay at the table to eat.

Helpful Tips:

- Consider the distractions in the room and limit where possible.
- Sit on a suitable chair (angle of hips, knees, ankles, and elbows should be at 90°); ensure your child's chair is at a good height and their feet are supported.
- Ensure their elbows are resting comfortably, allowing easy forearm movement across the table surface.
- Serve small portions so as not to overwhelm the child.
- Model good behaviour of what you expect at mealtimes e.g sitting at the table/using cutlery.
- Try having a shared plate e.g. vegetables, side dishes and main course in the middle of the table, and everyone demonstrating helping themselves.
- If diet is restricted, start by introducing variations on the foods they already tolerate i.e., different brands of same foods or food with a similar texture or taste.
- Plate with compartments/have a shared plate with an adult in order to help decrease the pressure.
- Keep expectations low especially when trying new foods.

Preparing your child for eating:

- Heavy work (carrying, pushing) and firm bear hugs – see proprioceptive activity sheet.
- Help with preparing food/serving food.
- Help setting the table.
- Visual support system – mealtime routine and order in which to eat.

Sensory tips for eating:

- Before eating, help your child to prepare for the meal by squashing their cheeks, apply pressure on the jaw and lips, pull cheeks to make funny faces.
- Hold a vibrating toy or electric toothbrush against the outside of the mouth and cheeks.
- Before eating, encourage child to play games that require them to push their tongue in to the inside of their cheek e.g., poking inside of cheek with tongue, and pushing back in with finger.
- Blow up cheeks with air and squash with hand.
- Allow children to smell and explore food texture with their hands as this is an important preparation for accepting the food in their mouth.

Things to consider:

- Use familiar bowl/spoon that you know works for them.
- Offer them an element of choice e.g., sweetcorn or peas.
- Use mirror for the child to check if their face is clean. Reinforcing the need to swallow before they put the next mouthful in.