



FEEDING DISORDERS

Feeding your baby and watching her grow is a pleasurable experience for both parents and infants. As children get older, parents continue to get great satisfaction from knowing that they have provided well for one of their child's most basic needs: nourishment. When problems arise, this can be very stressful for the entire family. Being pro-active in seeking assistance is very important.

Infants: Pediatricians, lactation specialists and speech-language pathologists help when newborns have problems with sucking and swallowing. Occupational and physical therapists can offer support as well.

Toddlers: Some children have difficulty transitioning from bottle or breast feeding to baby food and table foods. Talk to your pediatrician about this. Potential causes include:

- Oral motor issues that may make swallowing harder
- Gastroesophageal reflux disease that causes pain during and after mealtimes
- Sensitivity to new food textures or tastes

Talk to your pediatrician about this before your child habitually refuses food because this can become a power struggle. Medical assessments such as a swallowing study may be indicated.

Preschoolers: Sometimes children with developmental problems develop extreme food selectivity. They may only eat a few foods, and the foods may have to be in the same container or package before they will be accepted by the child. If your pediatrician does not feel that there is a medical problem that is causing the feeding disorder, it is essential to develop a plan for addressing this before the habits become too ingrained.

Tips for reducing food selectivity:

- Limit snacks and "grazing" so that the child will be hungry at mealtime.
- Encourage the child to help prepare the family's meal. Touching many foods, helping mix and stir, and then helping serve foods as appropriate can help the child become more accepting of a variety of foods.
- Be sure to make mealtime relaxed and pleasant.
- Make sure that the child's plate has at least a taste of each food .
- Shift the focus from watching the child eat to talking about topics that interest him.
- After the child tastes non-preferred foods, follow this with something pleasurable that the child enjoys.
- Make sure you eat a variety of foods so that the child sees that you enjoy this.
- If necessary, introduce extremely small amounts of non-preferred food into foods the child will already eat and gradually increase the amount that you add. (Be sure that the child does not see you do this!)
- Be patient and contact a speech-language pathologist or behavior specialist if these strategies are not helping.

