

Further information

If you need more information or advice, please visit some of the websites below:

- Fun First Foods Leaflet: healthscotland.com/documents/303.aspx
- Parent Club Scottish Government: parentclub.scot/
- First Steps Nutrition Trust: firststepsnutrition.org/

Contact us:

Developing your child's eating and drinking skills PILOT V0.1
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Children and Young People's Speech and Language Therapy



Developing your child's eating and drinking skills



Top tips for parents

Eating and drinking: early development

Learning to eat is like any other part of development, it takes time and can vary greatly from child to child. Some children need more time than others to develop these skills.

Development of eating and drinking skills usually takes place in the first 12-18 months of a child's life.

Birth to six months

Milk (breast or formula) is your child's only source of nutrition.

Around six months

Start to wean your child on to solids, usually smooth purees. Movements of tongue and jaw develop. At this point you can introduce a cup for your child to drink from with your help.

7-12 months

Most children can manage more textures such as soft, lumpy, mashed and chopped food. Early chewing skills start to develop. The child will become more interested in feeding themselves. They may attempt to use a spoon but their control could be poor. They may hold a cup but can spill lots.

12-18 months

Most children will have more mature chewing skills and can cope with most textures and foods. They are often able to bring a filled spoon to their mouth and drink from a cup, perhaps biting on the rim or using a straw. They may start to enjoy taking part in family meals.



Make mealtimes fun

- Keep mealtimes relaxed – chat and have fun
- Let your child see you eating at mealtimes
- Comment positively – “this is yummy”
- Avoid distractions (such as the TV)
- Offer your child choices where possible (e.g. would you like milk or water to drink?)
- Keep language simple and emphasise key words
- Accept when your child says they have had enough.

Don't feel guilty when one meal doesn't go as you would have liked. Put it behind you and approach the next meal positively.



Milk after meals

Children who have lots of drinks that are rich in calories and energy (such as milk, fruit juices and fizzy or sweetened drinks) may have less appetite when it comes to meal and snack times. Only give your child milk after they have eaten their food. Speak to your Health visitor for advice if you are concerned about your child's fluid intake



Sensory issues

Some children can show greater sensitivities to food tastes, smells and textures which can disrupt mealtimes. Here are a few suggestions that may help:

- Messy play with non food substances (e.g. gloop, play dough, paint)
- Messy play with food but no pressure to eat it
- Begin with dried textures such as uncooked pasta and cereal
- Move onto wet and sticky textures such as angel delight.
- Involve multiple senses – smell, touch and taste

Seating

It is important that your child is in a good position to eat and drink. They should remain in an **upright, middle position**.

This means that they should sit at the table or have a tray attached to their high chair. The tray or table should be at waist height and their feet should be firmly on the floor. Use a

Trying new textures

Some children find it difficult to move on from smooth foods to more solid or lumpier foods.

Reflux (where stomach contents travel back up to the throat) can cause great discomfort which children can then go on to associate with eating and drinking. This can cause particular difficulties when moving from smooth to lumpy food textures. Speak to your GP or health visitor if you have concerns about reflux.

For children who are not keen to try lumps- **keep trying**. Research shows that increasing exposure to foods helps increase acceptance. We have to eat something about **sixteen times** before we like it although for some children it may take even longer.

Try melt in the mouth foods (e.g. Cheese puff crisps) which give your child the experience of harder textures which they can bite but without the need to chew too much.

Picky eaters

If your child refuses to try new foods, try the following:

Mirror image

Sit in front of a mirror with your child and model placing a new taste on your lips. Encourage them to do the same and give them a cloth to wipe it away if they need to.

Food play

Use real food in play where the child doesn't have to eat it. Introduce different types of textures (e.g. dried pasta, cooked pasta, breadsticks, Angel Delight) to encourage your child to explore how foods smell and feel.



Encourage your child to play with toys associated with food (e.g. cooking pans, bowls and toy food).

Puppet play

Model feeding pretend and real foods to a puppet and to yourself.

Feed me

Encourage your child to feed you - exaggerate your response to food with pleasurable sounds



It takes time

It may take **a long time** of offering a new food for a child to accept it, so be prepared to keep trying. Here are some ideas to help:

- Serve small portions so you don't overwhelm your child
- Introduce only one new food at a time. Set small goals in stages to allow them to move step by step
- Encourage them to take a small piece of a new food on their plate or on a small plate next to theirs (e.g. one pea). Gradually increase the amount (e.g. two or three peas) before putting it in their mouth.
- Give your child permission not to eat the new food and involve them in throwing it away.

If you have any concerns about your child's development (such as motor or communication skills), speak to your Health Visitor.