

Top tips for fussy eaters

It is common for children to go through phases where they refuse to try new foods. Don't be discouraged, here's some practical tips to help you through.

- The early childcare setting is a great opportunity for trying new foods – share your successes with parents.
- Be an enthusiastic role model – try different healthy foods together.
- Create relaxed, happy meal times, compliment good eating behaviour.
- Avoid offering dessert or other treat foods as a reward. This sends mixed messages that healthy foods are less interesting.
- Offer a variety of healthy foods and encourage children to serve themselves, choosing what goes on their plate and how much they eat.
- Don't insist that they 'clean their plate' this can override their natural feelings of fullness.
- Involve children in food preparation, from gardening and menu planning to shopping and cooking.
- Encourage choice between foods but set limits for example, whether they would like A or B.
- Keep trying! Sometimes a child needs 8-15 positive exposures to a new food before they accept it.
- Ask 'Would you like to try?' for unfamiliar foods.
- Be mindful of milk around meal times as too much can fill small tummies. Offer after meals or with snacks.
- Discuss strategies with whānau so everyone agrees on a consistent approach to trying new foods.
- Offer non-food rewards for good behaviour such as a trip to the park.

Remember – children may have varying appetites and different food preferences day to day. They may eat more or less at certain meals and during certain stages.

Here's some ideas to make food fun to eat:

- Offer food in child-sized portions – they can always ask for more.
- Offer unfamiliar (or less-liked) food together with a favourite one.
- Cut fruit and veggies into finger sizes, use yoghurt and hummus for dipping.
- Include a variety of colours, textures and shapes – a cookie cutter works well!
- Create imaginative names for foods – call broccoli 'mini trees' or 'X-ray vision carrots'.

