



## From fussy eater to food lover Put an end to meal time meltdowns

*If fights over food end in tears you're not alone, most Australian parents have the same problem. Rafferty's Garden Nutrition Expert, Karen Kingham looks at the bigger picture and provides solutions for worried parents.*

As a parent myself, I can completely relate to the fact that 82% of Australian parents with toddlers worry about feeding them properly. And is it any wonder when an Australian survey shows that 50% of children aged between two and four are fussy eaters?

Emerging in or around their second year, fussiness with food is actually a normal part of growing up. It ties in with other emotional and physical changes too, such as the slowing of growth, an emerging sense of self that drives assertions of independence and the development of gross motor skills that need lots and lots of practice.

Many parents are also unaware that it's natural for children to be wary of new foods - regardless of how they taste. And experts suggest you may need to offer new foods as many as 10 times before they are accepted.

With the big picture in mind, here are my top 5 tips for turning fussy eaters into food lovers:

1. **Progress the texture**  
Ditch the very smooth puree as soon as your baby gets the hang of it. UK research reveals delay in the introduction of textured and lumpy foods after nine months can result in fussier food habits that may extend into the school age years.
2. **Don't stop**  
Keep putting new and untried foods on their plate. Becoming familiar with these foods is the first step to actually eating it. I know it may seem wasteful but keep amounts small – its worth it.
3. **Keep meal and snack sizes small**  
Growth drives hunger and hunger drives appetite in small children and babies. And, because growth occurs in spurts, you can never tell if they'll eat like a bird or a bear. Less on their plate means they can always have more, which also appeals to their desire for control.
4. **Hold the drinks**  
Fluids take the edge of hunger. Serve meal time drinks in a proper cup and limit them to milk or water. Also avoid allowing constant access to drinks. Let them ask or offer a drink regularly.
5. **Relax about food refusal**  
Often a bid for control and not about food at all, treat food refusal consistently with an “eat this or nothing” policy. Try not to cave in with alternatives you know they'll eat – they quickly learn to play *that* game. Healthy kids offered healthy food will never starve and the next meal or snack is never too far away.
6. **Self service**  
Encourage independence and new motor skills with opportunities to self serve from bowls in the center of the table – like a mini smorgasbord. Just try not to worry about the mess!
7. **Shift your main**  
Consider making lunch the main meal. Tired toddlers are usually not interested in food. In our house, evening meals became much more pleasant when the pressure to eat a big meal was relaxed.

8. Keep it simple  
Go for plain basic food. Hours spent on elaborate food preparation is lost on a toddler and only serves to fuel your disappointment when they won't eat it.
9. Enlist some help  
Make food interesting somewhere other than the table. Involve children in shopping, preparing and even growing food if you are can.
10. Be a super model  
Make meal times a family affair so you can model good eating habits. According to American research children are more likely to try new foods when they see an adult (you!) eating it.

#### References

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