

# HELP MY CHILD WON'T EAT!



Produced by



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A GUIDE FOR FAMILIES

## HELP...MY CHILD WON'T EAT!



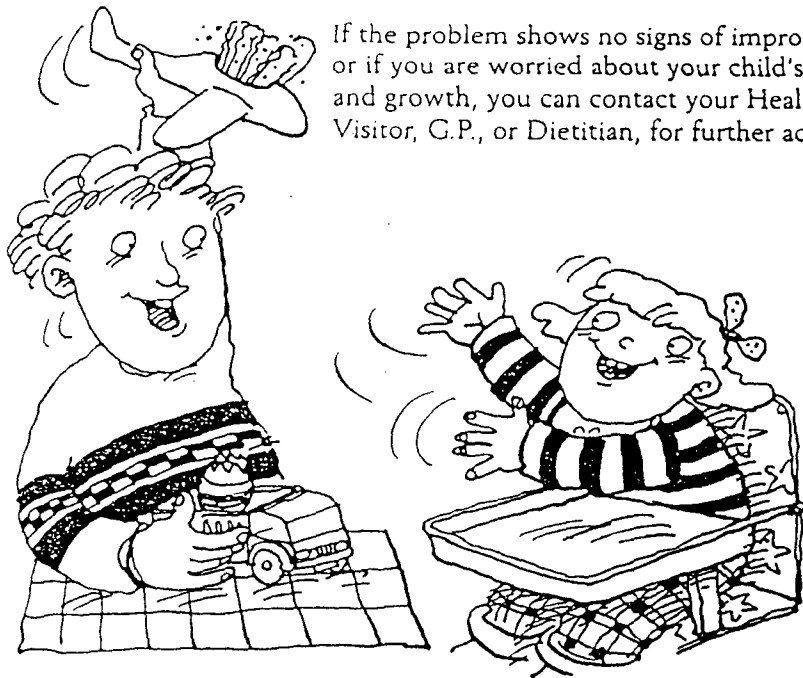
**M**any children go through phases of refusing to eat certain foods or at times refusing to eat anything at all.

This is particularly common in children up to the age of five years, but may occur at any time. It is often a way of showing independence ("the terrible twos") and is a normal part of growing up.

Although it is very worrying, children will not harm themselves if they don't eat enough for a short while. They may need less to eat than you think.

*It may help to discuss the problem with other parents who have already gone through the same situation with their child.*

If the problem shows no signs of improving, or if you are worried about your child's weight and growth, you can contact your Health Visitor, G.P., or Dietitian, for further advice.



## WHAT CAN I DO?

Offer regular meals and snacks, as this is better than letting your child "pick" through the whole day.

Eat at the same time as your child if possible, as he will learn from you. Try and make them enjoyable social occasions - *make them fun!*

Sit at the table if possible and use brightly coloured and attractive plates and cups.

Try to eat in a calm, relaxed area, without the television! - children are easily distracted.

Try not to rush a meal, as your child may be slow to eat, yet try not to let meals drag on for too long - half an hour is about right.



## HOW CAN I HELP?

Never force a child to eat.

*Your child is telling you he has had enough when:*

- he turns his head away
- he pushes the bowl or plate away or onto the floor!
- he screams or shouts
- he spits food out repeatedly
- he holds his food in his mouth and refuses to swallow it.



Try not to show that you are worried or annoyed by your child not eating. Although it is a very difficult thing to do, if your child is not eating, take the food away without comment.

It is a good idea for children to use their fingers to play with food, do not worry if they make a mess! If your child stops eating at a meal, try once to encourage him to take a little more, if this is successful show him you are pleased (say "Good Boy, well done") and smile. Offer a reward such as taking him to the park later or spending some special time playing together. Do not offer a reward of food.



## WHICH FOODS DO I GIVE WHEN?

Give small portions of food at meal times. If these are finished offer more. Do not take food away and offer a completely different meal if the first one is refused.

Fizzy drinks, squash and milk can fill a child up, as can crisps, biscuits and cakes, so he has a smaller appetite for food at meal times. If giving these, avoid them at or close to meal times.

While a child is being fussy and refusing foods, it is best not to offer new foods. Finger foods are easier to manage as a child can feed himself.



Try sandwiches, sausages, cheese slices or soft cheese, chips, fish fingers, vegetable slices, and pieces of fruits.

Milk is a nutritious drink - aim for about a pint a day. But this should not replace meals. Be careful not to let your child drink lots of milk in the day or at night.



# SENSIBLE EATING FOR 1 - 5 YEARS

*Try a variety of foods for a well balanced diet.*

Suggestions to help you.

## Milk and Dairy Foods

Try to give a pint of full fat milk daily.  
Try cheese, yogurts, fromage frais, custard and milk puddings as good alternatives to some of the milk.

## Meat and Alternatives

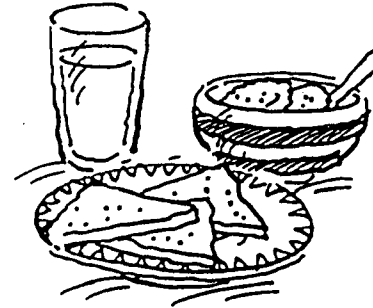
All types of meat and fish are suitable. Many children enjoy minced meat, sausages, chicken, fish fingers, and fish in sauces. Plus vegetables like chick peas and lentils make good casseroles. Eggs and baked beans are good too.

## Starchy Foods

Give these foods at each meal.  
Most children enjoy eating breakfast cereals and porridge. Other starchy foods to encourage include bread, potatoes, chapati, yam and green banana, pasta, tinned spaghetti and rice.

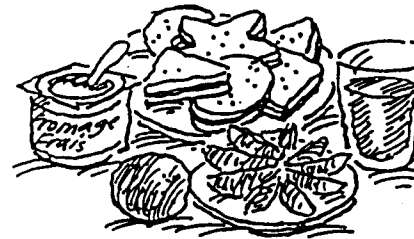
### Breakfast

Small bowl of breakfast cereal and milk or toast fingers with butter/margarine and jam/honey.  
Beaker of milk to drink.



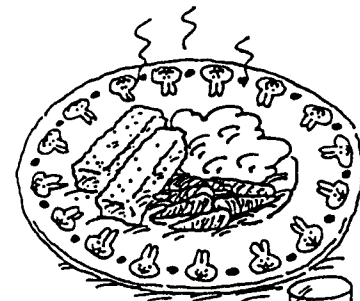
### Snack Meal

Sandwich in bite size shapes e.g ham, cheese, peanut butter.  
or baked beans or cheese on toast.  
Small pot of yogurt/fromage frais.  
Beaker of water or fruit juice.



### Main Meal

Pasta dishes e.g macaroni cheese, spaghetti bolognese.  
Chapati/rice and curry.  
Fish in white, cheese or parsley sauce.  
Roast meat or mince e.g shepherds pie.  
Fish fingers/chicken nuggets.  
Serve with fingers of carrots, swede etc or peas and a scoop of mashed potato.  
Fruit segments/slices/shapes  
Beaker of water or fruit juice.



### Bedtime

Beaker of milk and a biscuit.



## Fruit and vegetables

Give 2 portions a day - cooked or raw. All types fresh, frozen or tinned are good.

## Fats and Oils

Growing children still need margarine/butter and oils.

## Sugary Foods

Foods containing sugar are often part of a child's diet. Try not to give them between meals. Look after your child's teeth.

## Vitamins

A vitamin supplement, containing vitamins A, C and D, is recommended for all children from six months up to at least two years and preferably five years. Ask your health visitor about this.