

Children's Early Years Occupational Therapy Service



Feeding Tots

Feeding advice and strategies for
Parents/Guardians

There are several reasons why children may have challenges with eating. Feeding requires a number of key skills including postural stability, motor co-ordination and well as tolerances of different food types, textures and smells.

Medical Conditions

- If your child has a limited diet, this may be their way to avoid reactions such as stomach aches and pains. Constipation may also make your child have stomach cramping and cause food refusal.
- Problems such as acid reflux or stomach upset caused by medicines your child takes daily may cause stomach pain and make them not want to eat. If you are concerned about this, speak to your paediatrician or G.P.
- If you notice a food your child eats regularly an upset stomach, rash or other symptoms, a food allergy may be present. If you are concerned about this please speak to your paediatrician or GP.
- Some children who have had pain from reflux or surgery as infants can go on to develop feeding difficulties. They may refuse to eat because of association with food and pain.

Ideas to support Mealtimes

- Encourage active play and movement activities before sitting at the table for a meal.
- Set up good pre and post mealtime routines e.g. setting the table, washing hands, 5 minute warning and a clean-up routine involving scraping scraps into the bin.
- Eat together at the dinner table. This encourages social interactions, social modelling and exposure to different foods. Children are more likely to eat a new food if an adult is eating the same food versus just present or eating a different food.
- Use a plain placemat to define the child's food space. This is then a portable cue that can be transferred to anywhere you go.
- If needed, allow your child movement breaks during mealtimes or allow them to sit on an air cushion e.g. move-n-sit, disc-o-sit cushion or ball chair.
- Ensure your child is feeling supported. If their feet are not supported on the ground, they may feel postural insecurity, so a foot step can help.
- Place a heavy lap bag on your child's knee during mealtimes.
- Use a non-slip mat under their plate to hold it still.
- Offer 'family meals' with a buffet style set up on the table for everyone to serve themselves.
- Involve the child in meal preparations to increase their exposure to foods.
- Find other times to play with food outside of mealtimes in a different spot to where the child normally eats. e.g. puddings or jelly.
- Ensure the child has a face cloth during mealtimes to wipe their hands and face straight away if they are over sensitive to touch.
- Minimise visual and auditory distractions during meal times.

Commercially available products to support in this area

The Tripp Trapp chair

The Tripp Trapp chair is a modular high chair that grows with the child. Very distinctive in looks, it brings any child to the correct height of the table and has a footplate that can be lowered as the child grows.



The Roba Sit-Up High

The Roba Sit-Up chair is another modular high chair that grows with the child. Just like the Tripp Trapp chair, it brings any child to the correct high of the table and has a footplate that can be lowered as the child grows.



Cutlery

There are various forms and designs of cutlery to support children who have difficulty self-feeding.



Visual Timers

A 15, 20 or 30 minute visual timer will give your child a visual understanding and reminder of when the task will end and thus reduce some of anxiety around meals. These have proven very effective in this area.



High sided/segmented plates

High sided plates help children load their spoons and prevent food from falling off the plate. Segments plates keep food groups and textures separate.



Anti-slip Matting/placemat

Dycem or a similar form of anti-slip matting is a great way of keeping the plate on the table and preventing it from moving when your child is loading their spoon.



Suction Plates

Some bowls and plates have a suction cup underneath to keep it on the table. These are very beneficial if your child tends to throw the plate or take it with them if they leave the table.



Bibs and Aprons

Bibs and aprons have 2 benefits. Firstly to protect clothing, secondly as a prompt of the mealtime routine.



Move N'sit cushions

Designed to go on most chairs, the cushion provides children with a supportive base to sit on whilst allowing them to fidget and move about thus reducing the anxiety around staying still for an allotted time.



Visual Meal Time Planners

Can be used to help children decide or understand what they are eating and encourage children to take an active part in meal-times; thus giving them a sense of control and ownership.

