

# Picky Eaters

## Handout 1: Introduction

**DISCLAIMER:** *These handouts have been produced for children who are having difficulty in eating a range of foods. It is expected that any strategies used within these leaflet are adapted to individual children and that any queries are discussed with a relevant health professional for that child prior to being tried. This information is not for children who have any physical reason that makes eating difficult.*

What is Picky Eating?

Picky eating is where a child is very particular over which foods they will and won't eat and only have a limited repertoire of accepted foods. This may encompass individual branding, shape or colour of foods.

**If a child has any difficulty swallowing (see 'Things to watch out for' section) he or she will need to see a specialist Speech and Language Therapist to assess for dysphagia (difficulties swallowing that could lead to choking).**

Picky eating can be described as fussy or faddy and usually results in a child refusing the food and becoming upset or frustrated around times when new foods are presented.

The majority of children go through phases of fussy eating, particularly as toddlers. This can often be part of normal development and nothing that needs particular interventions. This leaflet may have useful strategies to help, but often picky eating can resolve itself over time. However, if a child's difficulties are more severe and ongoing; this leaflet will hopefully help provide strategies to work towards overcoming this.

Children may refuse food for a variety of reasons including:

- Pain
- Difficulty chewing
- Sensory differences
- Fear from previous bad experiences (e.g. choking)
- Attention

## Things to watch out for

Choking	Aspiration
When the airway becomes blocked Child becomes silent, wide eyed and looks very scared.	When food or drink has gone down 'the wrong way'; this means entering the windpipe.
	Signs include recurrent, unexplained chest infections. Regular coughing when swallowing. Wet sounding voice. Eye watering. Change of colour to face and/ or lips.

Despite a restricted diet, most children take enough nutrition to enable them to grow well. Your Health Visitor will be able to check your child's height and weight and they can refer on if there are any concerns about this.

If a child is:

- Losing weight
- Not growing

Speak to your GP or health visitor about a referral to a dietitian.

If a child is:

- Aspirating
- Choking
- Struggling with physical oral development

A referral for an assessment of your child's swallowing by a speech and language therapist must be made by a Paediatrician or GP.

What to do next

Try reading the relevant handouts:

- Picky Eating Handout 2: How and what children eat
- Picky Eating Handout 3: Sensory issues
- Picky Eating Handout 4: Practical strategies

If you try strategies consistently in these handouts without any success, please discuss your concerns with your child's GP, health visitor or paediatrician. They will be able to refer on to relevant professionals if they feel the level of need is significant.

At present, the NHS provides support for children who are picky eaters that have a physical oral development difficulty, concerns around the safety of their swallow or not gaining weight or growing. If children have none of these issues but continue to be picky eaters, there is no NHS funded service to support picky eating.

Further Reading

Ellyn Satter Institute - <http://ellynsatterinstitute.org/hf/howtofeed.php>

Range of Ellyn Satter's books such as 'Child of Mine: Feeding your child with love and good sense'.

References

Toomey, K.A. 2010. Picky Eaters vs. Problem Feeders: The SOS Approach to Feeding.

Satter, E. 2000. *Child of Mine: Feeding your child with love and good sense*. Bull Publishing.

## Contact details

### Children's Therapy Services

Bournemouth, Poole and East Dorset: 0300 019 2936

### Speech and Language Therapy

Bournemouth, Poole and East Dorset: 0300 019 3208

West Dorset: 01305 254743

### Paediatric Dietetics

Bournemouth, Poole and East Dorset: 0300 019 2593

For further general health-related information, please ask the relevant department for an information prescription or contact:

Patient Experience

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**If you wish to make any comments or to ask about any research evidence used to write this leaflet, please contact the Patient Experience Team on 0300 019 8499, write to the Patient Experience Team (address above) or email [patientexperienceteam@uhd.nhs.uk](mailto:patientexperienceteam@uhd.nhs.uk)**

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