

Navigating feeding concerns



Before you start

Supporting your child to eat a range of healthy foods is a primary concern for many parents and caregivers. We worry about our children getting the nutrition they need to learn and grow. It's important to do your research and prepare before you tackle supporting your child to explore new foods.

As a first step, it might be helpful to write down some specific information about your child's current eating habits. This could take the form of a food diary or a list of what you've noticed about how your child currently likes to eat. For example, you might notice the following:

What my child likes to eat

Vanilla yoghurt
Plain crisps
Weetbix with warm milk
Strawberry roll-ups
Milk from a bottle
Chicken nuggets from the store

What my child used to eat (but won't any longer)

Crumbed chicken tenders
Home-made chicken nuggets
Rice with corn and bacon

What my child seems interested in (but won't actually eat)

Looking at his brother's fried rice
Smelling our food when we eat

What sensory sensitivities have I noticed

Will gag when smells mango and banana
Will gag when I try yoghurt with lumps of fruit
Pushes away food on the table near him when it smells too strong (e.g., fried fish)

Rules about how my child eats

Only with Mum or Dad, not extended family
Only on the Spiderman plate
Only with red plastic cup
Foods must not touch

Will eat different foods at childcare than he eats at home

Support

Supporting your child to broaden their food repertoire can be challenging and there may be some safety concerns you need to address before you start. Having the right professionals to support you and your child can make the process safer, less stressful and more effective.

Who can help you?

Research indicates having a multidisciplinary team is important to safely and effectively work on eating challenges. Your support team might include:

- GP or Paediatrician
- Speech Pathologist
- Dietician
- Behaviour Consultant
- and others as needed.

When working with professionals, look for people who will take an assent-based approach with your child, where your child's feeding won't be forced and will instead be gradually improved over time. This approach allows us to read and respect the signals of children and sets them up for a gentle and supportive approach to broadening the foods they will accept and enjoy.



Areas of focus

What could you focus on?

When deciding on a goal, ask yourself three primary questions.

- **Is it safe?** Have you ruled out any medical or physical concerns that should be covered off first, before you embark on any eating intervention plans?
- **Is it important?** Although we may have preferences for the foods we hope our child will eat (we all want our children to love veggies!), it is essential to have a realistic approach to selecting target foods. We may be better off aiming for 1-2 new fruits packed with nutrients than aiming for your child to eat 10 different fruits. Taking a very pragmatic approach to foods is crucial so you don't overwhelm your child with new things they need to try.
- **Is it feasible?** Aim for the foods that are most likely to be successful new additions to your child's repertoire rather than those you desperately want them to eat. For example, getting your child to eat homemade chicken nuggets may be less likely than them accepting store-bought nuggets from one fast food chain versus another. When we start with foods that are very similar to what your child already likes to eat, it can sometimes be a more palatable option. We can then expand to further foods (you'll get to homemade nuggets!) from there once the initial new foods are introduced.



Additional resources

The professionals you know and trust should be your first point of contact for information about how to support expanding your child's eating.

For additional information see also:

[Speech Pathology Australia](#)

The SOS approach to feeding

[Introduction to SOS](#) and [Free workshop on SOS for families](#)

Autism UK

[Eating guide for all audiences](#)

Child Mind Institute

[Autism and picky eating](#)





About Autism Partnership

Autism Partnership has been supporting children and their families for over 25 years. We are a not-for-profit organisation.

We provide a range of evidence-based services for autistic children early in life and as they transition and settle into school.

Our team is made up of some of the most accomplished clinicians and advisors in the field in Australia.

Children and their families are central to everything we do, and we are honoured to play a role in their journey. Find out more about us at autismpartnership.com.au

