

## Encouraging new foods

### Try, try and try again!

#### Why do some children find this difficult?

Many children go through a stage of refusing to try new foods. In fact it's a part of normal childhood development and can peak between 2-6 yrs. Some children who were previously thought to be "good eaters" can start rejecting any new food and even reject food they previously eat.

As a result of this reaction to new foods, parents can begin to only offer foods that the child prefers and so the child's diet can become limited

Young children often like things to be the same and are not keen on new things. Children with developmental difficulties often also need this and can therefore be even more resistant to trying new foods.

Eating a limited diet, especially if important food groups like fruit and vegetables are missing, can lead to nutritional deficiencies or health problems.

If a child is struggling to try new foods it can cause mealtimes to become a stressful event for the whole family.

#### Strategies

- Try to stick to regular mealtimes. This allows your child to become hungry before the meal so they are more ready to eat
- Try to eat at a table with your child in a good sitting position
- Encourage, but don't pressurise. Give them plenty of praise but try to avoid getting into a battle. This can have an adverse effect and make the problem worse
- Lead by example , Eat at the same time as them, trying the new food and showing enjoyment
- Use cutlery and crockery that they find interesting at each meal, possibly
  - with favourite cartoon characters
- Offer very small servings of the new food alongside food they like on the plate. If this causes difficulty, then offer a very small amount of a new food on a different plate on the table
- Offer the new food regularly at intervals so that your child remembers what it is
- Try having two spoons ,one of the new food and the other their favourite food .Offering the favourite food right after they have the new food in their mouth. They will be less likely to spit it out if they have a mouthful of their favourite food!

- Avoid trickery or hiding new foods with some children. It may work but, if you find it doesn't, avoid doing this. Some children lose trust in the person feeding them and it is better if they know and understand that it is a new food. The danger of tricking them is they will stop eating the food you have been using to hide the new food
- Allow your child to use all their senses to explore the new food

Below are the stages that children may need to go through before they can successfully eat and swallow a new food:

- Looking at the food, either while it is on your plate or on the table
- Progressing to it being on their plate
- Smelling the new food, either while it is on the plate or as they pick it up and examine it
- Touching the new food to test its texture
- Licking the food to see if it initially tastes OK
- Biting off a small piece. This may be followed by spitting it out if the first taste or bite doesn't feel good
- Biting off, chewing and then finally swallowing
- Time for the taste to eventually become a portion
- It can take children up to 10 – 15 attempts to finally get to like a food
- Be relaxed and look for fun times to try foods where the emphasis is not on the mealtime, for example at a party, picnic or snack time
- Don't stop offering foods that have been refused. Just keep offering the food and wait for the fad to pass and for your child to start eating it again