













**COMMUNITY PAEDIATRIC OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY AND  
 PHYSIOTHERAPY SERVICES**

**EATING AND MEALTIMES**

DIFFICULTY	IDEAS TO TRY
<p data-bbox="204 602 517 633"><b>BEFORE STARTING</b></p>  <p data-bbox="416 891 762 922">Urban Junior Chair from Ikea</p>     	<p data-bbox="858 602 1390 1003">Consider your child's seating position. Are they sat appropriately to the table? Is the chair and table the right height? The child needs to have their feet supported. They will feel insecure and uncomfortable if their feet are dangling or they are sat on their knees etc. Use a box or upturned crate to support feet if necessary. If sitting at the table is a problem discuss this with the OT.</p> <p data-bbox="858 1043 1362 1368">Consider the environment, which room is the meal being eaten in? Limit noise, visual distractions, turn off the TV, are siblings causing a problem? Eliminate cooking odours or smells. Consider background noise the washing machine, microwave. All this sensory information may affect your child.</p> <p data-bbox="858 1408 1390 1585">Consider type of cutlery – feel and weight of the handles, plate colour or pattern. The contrast of food on a coloured plate can be difficult for some children.</p> <p data-bbox="858 1626 1385 1848">Children who do not like their food to touch together can use a plate that has divided areas.        Available from various internet sites or specialist suppliers  <a href="http://www.nrs-uk.co.uk">www.nrs-uk.co.uk</a></p> <p data-bbox="858 1888 1385 2060">Consider if your child eats best alone or with yourself or other family members. Too many people and too much food can be overwhelming, and cause a child to refused to</p>

	<p>participate.</p> <p>Consider the time of meals. Some children may be more tolerant of trying new foods if not acutely hungry when they just need to eat.</p> <p>Set a regular time to try new food, if you use a visual timetable include it on this.</p>
<p><b>PREPARATION FOR EATING</b></p>      	<p>Before a meal consider if your child needs to do an activity to calm. Activities which give deep pressure are calming i.e. rolled in a heavy rug or weighted blanket, push and pull activities, pushing against the wall, stamping, star jumps, trampet or trampoline.</p> <p>Specific activities for the hands and mouth can also be used i.e.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• pushing against each others hands,</li> <li>• the child pushing their hands together,</li> <li>• pushing down on your child's shoulders and long deep strokes down their arms and back</li> </ul> <p>Ask the child to do some activities to give deep pressure and proprioception to the mouth.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stretch the mouth wide open as if having a big yawn</li> <li>• Stretch the mouth into a big smile to say 'Weeeeeeee'</li> <li>• Press the lips together firmly</li> <li>• Clench the teeth together</li> <li>• Chew something firm such as the corner of a towel or flannel. Or a Chew Stick or Chew'llry</li> </ul> <p>Available from <a href="http://www.specialdirect.com">www.specialdirect.com</a> and other internet sources.</p> <p>Use different textures to rub around the mouth and down the cheeks. Sponge, net ball, textured wash cloth, soft nail brush, rough towel etc. NB it is important the child chooses the texture and applies it themself. They can rub and press around their mouth with their fingers.</p>

## FOOD CHOICES



Make a list of the foods your child likes/enjoys/will eat. Keep a food diary. Identify food preferences, textures, tastes, smells. Does your child prefer crunchy or chewy foods, bland plain coloured tasting food, hot or cold food, spicy or highly flavoured food, smooth textured food or lumpy food?

Use the preferences to widen the foods eaten by changing the format of the food.

For example:-

An apple can be stewed and pureed very smooth, or pureed and small lumps, pureed with larger lumps, grated, peeled and cut into thin slices, peeled and cut into quarters, eaten whole with the skin on or off. Different apples have different tastes and textures.

By changing the way the food is cooked/prepared and presented can help your child try new foods.

Vegetables can be mixed together, can be raw and crunchy, can be mashed or pureed and combined in dishes such as thick smooth soups or mince dishes. Meat can be given as a piece, small cubes, minced or pureed.

## FUSSY EATERS



To introduce new foods to your child identify the types and tastes your child prefers.

Try a food that is similar in taste, and texture. If possible discuss with your child a new food to try. Use pictures or visit the supermarket together.

Sometimes preparing the food together is useful.

Give your child a very small portion of that food in a format that they like i.e. mashed, cube, sliced etc. This is just a taste. The child may just need to touch or smell it initially before attempting to taste it.

Reassure your child that is all they need to do is taste it.

Give the new food regularly, everyday if possible. Gradually increase the amount you give.

## OVERFILLING THE MOUTH



This may be done better outside of a mealtime when there is no pressure of being hungry and needing to eat.

Ensure your child knows what an appropriate mouthful is. Use a smaller spoon, and teach only one spoonful at a time.

Encourage the child to put down the spoon between mouthfuls. Teach them to empty their mouth before putting in the next spoonful.

Before eating use sensory information to make the child more aware of the mouth and jaw, do some activities to give deep pressure and proprioception to the mouth.

Ask the child to-

- Stretch the mouth wide open as if having a big yawn
- Stretch the mouth into a big smile to say 'Weeeeeeee'
- Press the lips together firmly
- Clench the teeth together
- Blow air into their cheeks to make them bulge out (hamster cheeks)
- Pinch and massage the cheeks
- Chew something firm such as the corner of a towel or flannel. Or a Chew Stick or Chew'llry

Available from [www.specialdirect.com](http://www.specialdirect.com) and other internet sources.

Or try getting the child to suck an ice pop or lolly briefly for 20 seconds to give increased awareness to the lips and tongue. The lolly can be put back in the freezer and reused over the next week or so.

- Keep calm and be reassuring to your child. Do not force or pressure your child.
- Use rewards. Involve the child in choosing a suitable reward. Make it achievable at just the right challenge.
- If the child refuses a certain food, try it again at another time.
- Eat the food with your child, equally a sibling or friend may be supportive.
- Ask another family member to help with this if you feel their involvement would help.
- Involve the child in food play and food preparation activities.

**NAME:**

**DATE:**

<b>Ideas to try</b>	<b>Outcome</b>
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	
6	