

The All Bright Spotlight

All Bright Therapies

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Picky or a Problem?

At some point, every parent has difficulties with their child at mealtime, but how do you know when your child is just a picky eater or if there is something more to be concerned about? Because eating is necessary for life, and something we do several times per day, it can be easy to underestimate the complexity of mealtime. There are many things that can interfere with a child's desire, or willingness to eat. It is important to determine if your child's difficulties are a typical part of development or if there is cause for greater concern.

Most toddlers go through a "picky" phase which peaks between the ages of 15-24 months. This typical picky phase frequently corresponds with a toddler's new-found independence and discovery of the word "no!" These toddlers tolerate new foods on a plate and may even play with or explore the new foods with their hands, but often do not taste them. Though the child may only be eating a few favorite foods, a variety of food groups with a variety of tastes and textures are accepted. Food "jags," (when a child eats only one preferred food for several meals or days in a row) are common, but only last for a short period of time. The child may then refuse this same food; however, the food is typically accepted back into the repertoire within a few weeks. Typical picky eaters are growing normally and have enough energy to sustain their play.

Problem feeders are those children whose "pickiness" goes beyond what is considered typical. These are children who will eliminate entire food groups, such as veggies, fruits, or meats. They might eat only foods of a certain texture, temperature, or color. These families typically dread mealtimes. Children with these difficulties adamantly refuse to try new foods, are unable to tolerate new/non-preferred foods on or near their plate. A food repertoire of less than 15-20 foods is common. Children with feeding difficulties may become tired of a previously preferred food and "lose" that food from their food repertoire permanently. Typically, parents of children with feeding difficulties can trace the negative behaviors all the way back to the first solid foods. For children with feeding difficulties, eating is not internally motivating.

It is important to note that children with feeding difficulties may have an underlying medical issue that must be addressed prior to beginning feeding therapy. There are many issues that are not visible to the naked eye which may interfere with a child's ability to tolerate foods. For instance, conditions of the gastro-intestinal tract can cause eating to

be painful. Food allergies and intolerances can also cause pain and discomfort. Young children are unable to verbalize why they don't like to eat. Some signs to look for include poor weight gain, anxiety and nervous behaviors during meals, signs of pain (grimacing) during swallowing, and decreased appetite. If you have these concerns, talk to your pediatrician first. Feeding concerns are best addressed as early on so as to prevent further issues from developing.

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Occupational Therapists:

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Red Flags for Feeding Referral:

- Frequent coughing, choking, and gagging during meals
- Ongoing poor weight gain
- Difficulty transitioning to new food textures
- Consistent drooling
- Raspy "wet" vocal quality after eating/drinking
- Refusing to eat certain food groups, temperatures, textures
- Continuing to tolerate ONLY baby foods past 12 months
- Food repertoire of less than 20 foods at 18 months
- Unable to tolerate new foods on/near plate

•An All Bright Family's Story•

Gavin's family initially became concerned with his mealtime difficulties after being on a nasogastric feeding tube for 6 months due to a severe case of Eosinophilic Esophagitis (EE). Gavin struggled immensely with returning to eating food. As Gavin's diet had been restricted for so long, he really needed to relearn how to eat at only 2+ years old. He was really struggling with "trusting" foods again. His decreased willingness to eat period, never mind any sort of variety or "new" foods, caused the family to reach out for help. Home-based feeding therapy was recommended 1x/week and Gavin now participates in weekly group feeding therapy sessions also. Gavin's mother now reports that "therapy has definitely helped Gavin become a better eater, no question. He is now thriving and happy on a "normal" diet. That said, as with anything it is a process and we are still very much in the thick of things with much opportunity for improvement." As a parent of a child struggling with eating difficulties, Gavin's mother's advice to other parents is "Act now. Reach out and get advice, help, etc. This is your child's health and happiness and something they will deal with multiple times a day for every day of their life so it is important that it be a positive experience."

Services We Offer:

Speech Therapy:

Apraxia • Articulation • Phonological Disorders
Pragmatic and Social Language Disorders
Cleft Lip and Palate and Craniofacial Syndromes
Expressive/Receptive Language Disorders • Cerebral
Palsy and Neuromotor Disorders
Genetic Syndromes • Speaking Valves • Feeding

Occupational Therapy:

Poor Motor Planning • Motor Delayed Infants
Fine and Visual Motor Delays • Handwriting Difficulties
Regulation Disorders • Sensory Integration Dysfunction
Torticollis • Brachial Plexus Injury
Splinting and Bracing • Feeding
Cerebral Palsy and Neuromotor Disorders

Groups and Classes:

Social Language Groups • Articulation Groups • Language Development Groups • Feeding Group • Apraxia Group
Body Awareness Group • Handwriting and Pre-writing Group • Self Regulation Group • Parent Education Course

We currently have availability for Speech /Occupational Therapy group and/or Feeding Therapy group for children aged 2.5 to 4 years of age. Please call if you are interested.

Our Favorite Feeding Resources:

<http://www.aap.org/>

The American Academy of Pediatrics is an excellent source for developmental guidelines in all areas, including feeding.

<http://www.ellynsatter.com/>

Ellyn Satter is a nutritionist who has written several books on the topic of childhood nutrition and appetite. Look to Child of Mine for feeding advice from birth, and How to Get Your Kid to Eat to help with your picky eaters.

<http://cheriandlaura.blogspot.com/>

Creators of the Food Chaining approach, Cheri Fraker and Laua Walbert blog ideas and tips for making food fun and approachable. They also offer lots of suggestions of their favorite feeding products. Look to the Food Chaining book for detailed advice.

Kid-Friendly recipes and activities:

<http://wholesomebabyfood.momtastic.com/>

Healthy baby food recipes

<http://stepbystepcc.com/recipe.html>

Fun and cute snack ideas

<http://pickytots.blogspot.com/>

A site for fun toddler foods