

Feeding Refusal

As infants get older, they insist on feeding themselves and practicing new skills. They may refuse to let parents help them and may make terrible messes. This is how children learn. Many feeding problems can be avoided by encouraging children to feed themselves and not force feeding.

Bottle Refusal

It is common for babies to suddenly refuse to take a bottle. However, they often will take the formula from a cup or mixed into cereal and given by spoon. They may be telling you that they are ready to try solid foods. If your baby refuses to take formula by bottle, cup, or spoon, call your child's doctor.

Infant Food Refusal

It is common to see problems with solid foods when you stop breast or bottle feeding. Food refusal may be seen when:

- Your child isn't hungry.
- Your child does not like the food offered – either how it looks or how it tastes.
- Your child wants to feed himself and is not allowed to.
- Your child is tired.
- Food is too hot.
- Your child is wet and uncomfortable.
- Your child is teething.
- Food is not offered in favorite dish or cup.
- Your child wants to use a cup rather than a spoon.
- Your child wants a drink first.

Toddler Meal Refusal

Toddlers are picky eaters who often refuse certain foods (like vegetables). Don't make a big deal of it, offer other foods instead. If your child is refusing whole meals, try these methods:

1. Make mealtime pleasant: don't nag or scold for not eating.
2. Feed your child only at the table or in a highchair, not while playing or watching TV.
3. Talk about things at the table that would interest your child (like what he did today).
4. Let your child feed himself. Don't ever force your child to eat.

5. Offer small portions of food. You can always give more.
6. Turn off the television.
7. Put several foods on the plate, not just one thing, including at least one food your child likes.
8. PRAISE your child for eating his food, for trying new foods and for using good manners.
9. Set a timer for a reasonable time limit for the meal (like 20-30 minutes). When the timer goes off, clear the table and just say, "Dinner's over."
10. Offer planned snacks of nutritious foods. Do not allow your child to eat between set meal and snack times.
11. Do not use desserts as a reward. Offer dessert as part of the meal.

Also see these CARE CARDS:

- "Infant Feeding – 4 to 6 Months"
- "Infant Feeding – 6 to 9 Months"
- "Infant Feeding – 9 to 12 Months"
- "Feeding Your Toddler 1 to 3 Years Old"

Call your child's health care provider if:

- Your child refuses all food or drink.
- Your child is losing weight.
- Your child has not gained weight in six months.
- Your child has other signs of illness (fever, vomiting, diarrhea).
- Someone is punishing your child for not eating.
- You have other questions or concerns.