



Top tips from Jess on understanding and coping with fussy eating

The food writer Bee Wilson writes that eating is not innate: it is a learnt skill which is cultivated in early childhood. I've always believed that food and eating are deeply emotive experiences. The adage "food is love" is certainly true when it comes to feeding children, and it's why fussy eating is so frustrating and upsetting for parents and caregivers. From an early age, it's totally normal for kids to wrestle the adults close to them for autonomy, and like sleep or potty training, food refusal is a powerful tool at their disposal.*



I should say from the outset that I'm not a trained nutritionist or psychologist, but in the four years since I founded Jess Cooks, and the preceding eight years when I was running a children's cookery business, I've gleaned a fair bit of information about and experience of fussy eating and how to tackle it. Here are my top tips...

1. Start early

Given that eating is a skill that needs to be acquired, getting babies and toddlers involved with preparing and tasting a variety of foods from an early age is key. If you can make cooking, eating and enjoying food part of your daily routine, children will unconsciously absorb all of this without even realising.

2. Take the pressure off

This is particularly difficult given that feeding children is such an emotionally charged business, but try to relax around mealtimes. They might eat, they might not, and that's ok. There's nothing like a stressful atmosphere to take away anyone's appetite, and if everyone starts to dread mealtimes this will only compound the problem.

3. Persevere

Young children have a natural aversion to bitter foods like some of the leafy greens and may need to try a food multiple times before they learn that it is safe to eat. Keep trying and don't give up on new foods too quickly.

4. Give them back the control

Try giving the child a variety of five different foods and saying that they need to try at least three of them, but they get to decide which ones. Then, most importantly, leave them to it. They might surprise you!

5. Eat together

Shared mealtimes with your own children or children that are in your care models good eating habits and helps take the pressure off them.

(*It should be noted the information in this resource may not be applicable to children with special needs or sensory disorders.)

Some great resources...



Pickplates

These plates with different compartments are brilliant for serving a variety of foods, or for keeping sauces/dips and other dry foods separate.

<https://pickplates.com/>

First Bite by Bee Wilson

This book is a fantastic introduction to how we learn to eat and understanding the psychology behind fussy eating – an absolute must read!

