

ASD Family Help

Registered Charity No. 1135718

5 Top Tips Autism and Food Difficulties

Autistic people can be described as picky or selective eaters displaying very restricted diets which can be made up with as little as 5-10 foods they will accept. Often these will be dry, beige carbohydrates. A food may also only be accepted if it is a certain brand. This can lead to extreme anxiety/fear and possible gagging/vomiting when trying new foods. Foods can often be refused due to Sensory difficulties, this may be due to the taste, texture, look (colour), smell, temperature and feel of the food within their mouth. Sensory seeking can contribute to overeating, cramming or making unhealthy choices. We also have to consider the environment where they eat, who they eat with, how they are sitting and the cutlery they are using. Food behaviour may also play a role, negative past experiences, food touching and only wanting to eat or drink from a certain plate/cup. Here are a few ideas which might help with regards eating difficulties.

1. Establishing a good eating environment.

- a. Have a good routine/structure in place – Use visuals
- b. Have a comfortable chair, with arms and cushion, make sure their feet can touch the ground or on a foot stool.
- c. Give choices when you can
- d. Sometimes they like to eat alone, as they hear other people chewing their food.
- e. Use adaptive cutlery and non-slip mats so plates do not move.
- f. Try and stay positive and have fun and at meal times give them what they like best.

2. Have fun with food – make time to have fun with food, squeeze it, mash it, rub it on your hands, smell it, lick it. Divide a mixture of food they will eat and not into small bowls. Play a game by rolling a dice so they try a new food and a food they like.

3. Let them see you eat the food – let them know it is safe, let them feed you. Please never beg, plead or force a food. It's ok if they spit a food out.

4. Go slow – Just touching a food is a good start, to smelling, licking and then eating a tiny piece. All this is progress. Remember we try not to do this during meal times, only if they are relaxed and happy.

5. Practice activities with regards using their mouth – Oral motor exercises can help the muscles in the mouth and face work effectively for speech, eating, saliva control and sensory regulation. Here are a few ideas to have fun with them:

- a. Blow Bubbles – works on breath control and lip movement
- b. Playing a funny face making game using a mirror – exercises the face muscles and they can see how their tongue, lips and cheeks move.
- c. Blowing toys like windmills, blowing through straws and whistles help with sucking and blowing skills.

Do always seek further help if you are concerned about your child's eating and diet. Below are some helpful websites:

[Birmingham Food Refusal Service - Education and training - The Birmingham Food Refusal Service](#)

[SOS Approach to Feeding | Feeding Disorders in Children](#)

Do call our Help Line if you need to talk things through. 07384 733658 or email

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