



Selective Eating

Part 1: What is it and what can we do to help?

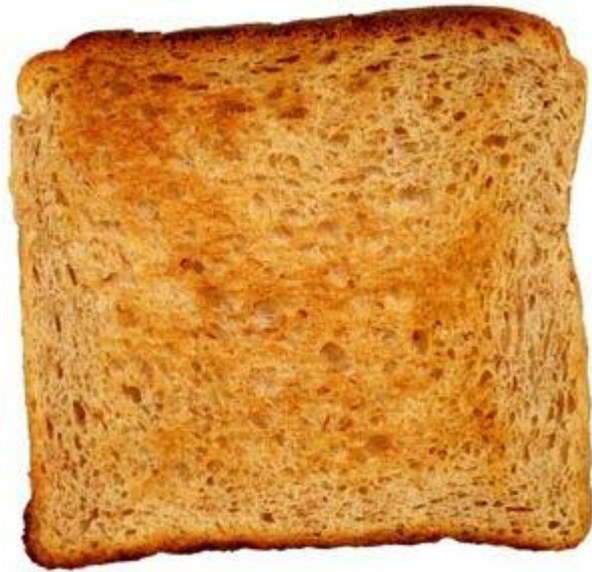
Understanding Selective Eating in ASD

- Why a child is reluctant or resistant to trying new or different foods?
- It may be the **processing style** or how the food is presented.
 - focus on local features vs. global features
- It may be a desire for **predictability** and sameness due to repetitive and ritualistic behaviour .
- There may be a lack of **social motivation** (copying) or difficulties coping with social/ environmental demands of mealtimes.
- Need to determine any **physiological factors** such as GI issues or poor recognition of hunger.
- And any psychological or **emotional factors**, such as anxiety, distress, negative associations, depression.

Local (picture on packet) NOT Global features e.g. are all lemon flavoured



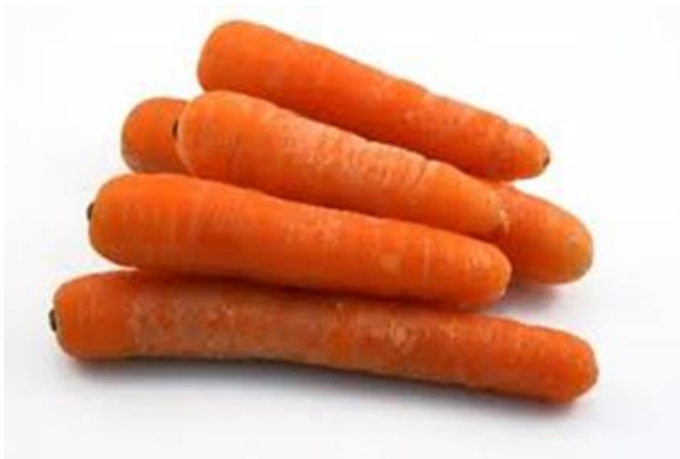
Local (shape of toast) NOT Global features e.g. are both toast



Local (colour and size) NOT Global features e.g. apple



I like carrot batons but won't eat any other carrot.



How to help

- Energy intake first priority (not balanced diet)
- Remember – this is not your fault!
- Enhancing predictability (routine, visual supports, timers, mirror, involving child in preparation)
- Sensory strategies – calming prior to mealtimes
- Familiarisation with foods – takes time: “Still learning about a food”
- Encourage category generalisation
- Taste trials
- Modelling (parents, staff, peers)
- Grading
- “Neutral” person

Sensory Processing Difficulties

- Difficulties coping with the **smells** in the mealtime environment;
- Accepting only bland **flavours**;
- Difficulties coping with the **noise** and **visual clutter** in the dining room/restaurants;
- Restricted range of **textures** tolerated;
- Preference for neutral **temperatures** (or very hot/cold);
- Reluctance to accept cutlery in mouth;
- Reluctance to touch food, dislike **messiness** on hands and around mouth.

Common Strategies & Limitations

1. Hiding or disguising new foods in preferred foods
2. Force feeding or extreme pressure to eat
3. Withholding preferred foods until 'tried' new food
4. Using preferred foods as rewards or 'first/then'
5. Leaving long gaps between meals to induce hunger
6. Gradual Introduction to foods in a playful, non-stressful way

General Advice

- Judge child's response/rigidities/ stress levels at meal times
- Appropriate timing
 - At mealtime, after preferred food?
 - Too disruptive to mealtime routine?
 - Chose a separate time, maybe a cooking session or snack time.
- Give choice and link with preferred foods

Gradual Introduction to new foods

- Offer a very small portion on plate.
- If not coping with new food on plate, it can be placed on a separate 'taster plate' or on a divider plate.
- Slowly, with no pressure
- Offer a spit bucket/cup
- Expose a new food up to 10-15 times before a resistant eater will either look, touch, smell, hold to mouth (continuous or intermittent?)
- If after this amount of time they continue to have an adverse reaction to the food move onto the next food item.



Familiarisation with foods

- Give child opportunity for role-play being the parent
 - serving out the food
 - feeding others
- This can be empowering for resistant eaters who have experienced little power around the dinner table.
- Provide positive role modelling- show you are enjoying your food!

Remember....

- Have fun with food
- Consistent meal time routine
- Calm, low pressure environment
- Offer at least one preferred food at mealtimes (you may chose to introduce new food in a different context).
- Taster foods – 5 stages; use of tick chart to grade and monitor progress.
- Give a choice of taster foods based on child's current preferences.
- Role modelling – eat with your child.
- No pressure so food and eating becomes a positive experience.



Food Exploration

Part 2: A Practical Activity to Try at Home

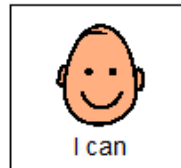
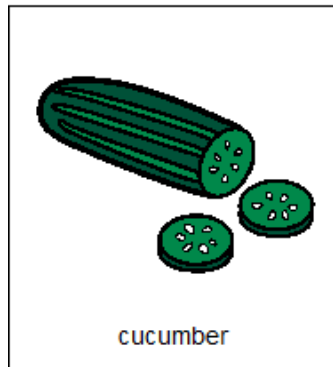
How to Introduce different foods








- Compliment skills taught in science at school about our senses and our body's nutrition.
- Based on the Sequential Oral Sensory (SOS) principles.
- Six steps to eating: Tolerates, Interacts with (looks), Smells, Touches, Tastes, Eats.
- A playful, non-stressful way, using knowledge gained at school in science, using the five senses.
- Increases comfort level by exploring different properties of the foods, including the colour, shape, texture, smell and taste.

A Continuum of Food Tolerances

- Follows developmental stages:
- **Hard textured food** (carrot stick, dried papaya, pitta bread)
- **Meltable hard solids** that have a defined texture on the exterior, but melt in the mouth in saliva (cheetos, frozen fruit)
- **Soft exterior** but holds shape, needs only tongue/munching pressure to break it apart (avocado, banana)
- **Soft exterior** that holds a shape, but needs munching/grind pressure to break apart (soft luncheon meats, pastas, cooked eggs, white breads)
- **Mixed textures** of above (macaroni and cheese, fish fingers)
- **Hard textured food** that needs grinding/rotary chew to break apart; and/or foods that tend to shatter/scatter in the mouth (cheerios, saltines, steak)

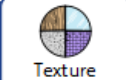
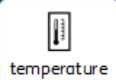

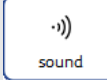



Sensory Stages to Food Acceptance



 look at	✓
 touch	
 smell	
 kiss	
 lick	
 nibble	
 swallow down into my tummy	

Recording Sheet



 Texture	 temperature	 taste	 sound	 Density	 wet	 Like
Runny	Hot	Sweet	Quiet	Soft	Wet	Like
Thick	Cold	Salty	Loud e.g. 'Crunchy'	Hard	Dry	Don't Like
'Gloupy' (In between)	Warm	Sour	In between	In Between	'Mushy' (In Between)	Not Sure

Visual Supports/ Reward Charts

 I'm working on	 putting on my lips	the new food on my plate is	 cucumber
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1	2	3	4	5
✓				

 I'm working for	 computer
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Visual Supports

Support children to make their own “Eat up” Book:

- food I like
- food I have tried
- food I am going to try

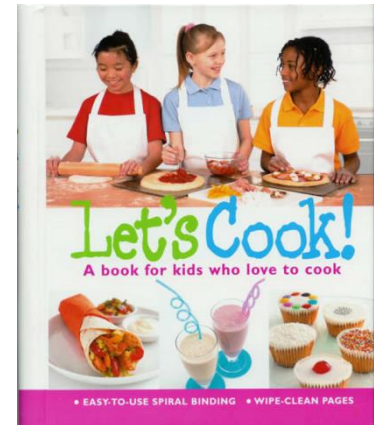


Sensory strategies

- Calm-alert state for mealtimes:
 - Prior: sensory circuit or quiet time
 - During: add/reduce sensory input as required e.g. ear defenders, weighted blankets, lap pads, vibrating cushion, weighted vest, fidgets, move 'n' sit cushion, chairs with arms.
- Oral and tactile desensitisation strategies at other times;
- Familiarisation with a range of foods through sensory exploration (Graded Approach)

Familiarisation with foods

- Painting with foods
- Food plates
- Grow vegetables/herbs
- Messy play (hide & seek motivators)
- Songs about food
- Books & videos
- Involve in making dinners
- Food preparation, cooking and baking
- Supermarket shopping games
- Making our own placemat



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dBc-83D5cNc>

Video
Building
Independence
using visuals

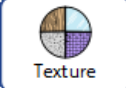
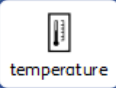

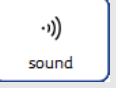
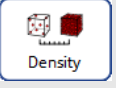
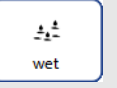

Activity

Aim: To describe foods by texture, temperature, & taste

Materials: Three foods of different texture, temperature, colour, hardness, sweetness, etc.

Activity: Cut food into small pieces and place separately on dishes. Include at least one familiar food and one new food.

One by one, the child decides what the name of the food is through looking, touch, smell, licking and biting the food. Fill in your detective sheet (below) and try and name the food.

 Texture	 temperature	 taste	 sound	 Density	 wet	 Like
Runny	Hot	Sweet	Quiet	Soft	Wet	Like
Thick	Cold	Salty	Loud e.g. 'Crunchy'	Hard	Dry	Don't Like
'Gloupy' (In between)	Warm	Sour	In between	In Between	'Mushy' (In Between)	Not Sure

Activity Schedule

1

Hard, sweet, cold raw carrot
Cold, hard bread sticks
Cold, hard, sweet apple



3

Cold, soft, sweet jelly
Hot, soft, savoury couscous
Hot, soft, savoury porridge



2

Soft, sweet, cold raisons
Crunchy, hot, savoury bagel
Hard, spicy Doritos



4

Soft, sweet, cold raisons
Crunchy, hot, savoury bagel
Hard, spicy Doritos



5

Hard, sour grapefruit
Hard, wet cucumber
Soft, stringy cheese