

CRUNCH BITES PODCAST

BITE SIZED CHILDREN'S NUTRITION INFO

Episode 3 -From fussy eating to adventurous appetites

Mikala: Hello, and welcome to Crunch Bites, a podcast for parents where we discuss all things children's nutrition and inspire you to build those healthy habits in the home. Join us as we chat about picky eating, reaching for rainbow foods, packing school lunches that actually get eaten, and so much more. Brought to you by Crunch and Sip and presented by Qualified Nutritionists. This podcast is packed with goodness and full of fresh ideas.

Nicole: Hi, everyone. Welcome to today's episode. We would like to begin by acknowledging that we are recording on the beautiful lands of the Whadjuk people from the Noongar Nation. We would like to pay our respect to the elder's past, present, and future, and recognize their continuing and deep connection to the land, water, and communities across the state.

Mikala: Thanks, Nic, and welcome everyone. So, today's episode is brought to you by Brussels sprouts, which is very fitting because we are going to be talking about food fussiness, and Brussels sprouts are one of those veggies that kids quite often turn their nose up at. Brussels sprouts are full of vitamin K, which is really important for bone development, and they're also jam-packed with vitamin C, which obviously boosts our strong immune systems and helps with iron absorption. In our house, we love to roast our Brussels sprouts, a little bit of olive oil, some salt and pepper, and then we grate a little bit of parmesan on top to serve. They are super delicious.

Nicole: That does sound really delicious. Quite often, the poor Brussels sprouts gets a bad rap because everyone thinks of the way their nana used to make it, which is boiled on a stovetop, which makes them super bitter and unpleasant, whereas if we're trying different techniques and roasting or pan frying, which is really popular in our house, it can definitely make them taste a lot better.

Mikala: That's true. I can attest to that.

Nicole: So, in today's episode, like Mikala mentioned, we will be talking about fussy eating. This is one of the most common questions we get from parents or complaints we hear from parents around children's nutrition. So hopefully we can provide you with lots of practical tips and ideas that you can go away and try at home with the kids. So, Mikala, before your time at Cancer Council WA, you used to work a lot in this space. So, I'm going to really pick your brains today about what parents can do to tackle fussy eating and encourage adventurous eating with their children. So firstly, is fussy eating normal?

Mikala: Yeah, it is. It's really normal. And I think that it's something that parents find quite alarming and can get quite, you know, worried about when their child turns their nose up at certain foods. A lot of parents say that their kids started off eating everything and then all of a sudden just developed quite strong food aversion or food refusal and became quite difficult to feed. But at the end of the day, it's a really normal process for kids to go through.

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It often kicks in around two, which is in line with just being a little bit more aware of their own bodies and having a little bit more control. And, you know, it's something that for the most part works itself out with a little bit of perseverance as a parent, a little bit of patience and, you know, a willingness to make it a fun space for kids as they're learning about their food preferences.

Nicole: Yeah, that's right. And we often see that kids will go through phases of fussy eating as well. So, it could be related to their growth or their developmental stages as well that they might peak or might kind of start refusing some food. So, what are some of the factors that can influence fussy eating?

Mikala: Well, for the most part, it's usually a sensory developmental journey for kids. So it could be that something was served to them and the temperature was a bit, you know, a bit hot or a bit too cold. And so, it's turned them off that particular food because of that sensory experience. It could be that they don't enjoy the texture of the food, the way that it's being served. For example, you know, if a food's quite crunchy and they've got a wobbly tooth, it could be causing pain, but they're not necessarily able to articulate that for their parents. It could be that they don't like the smell or the taste of the particular food at that time. We know that some kids are what we call super tasters, which means that the particular compounds in the foods have a stronger taste for them as they're kind of going through their taste bud development. So, you know, it can also simply be that they're not well or they're just too tired on that day. So, there's lots of reasons that feed into why kids say no to certain foods. And it doesn't necessarily mean that they don't actually like that food.

Nicole: So, we've talked a little bit about why or what fussy eating is, but what can parents do to tackle fussy eating or encourage their children to be a little bit more adventurous?

Mikala: Well, there's just a great number of top tips that I could go into if I ever had the time. So, I'll try and keep it short and sweet. But I mean, it comes down to, you know, starting off with being a role model to your kids. So eating together, showing them that you also really enjoy veggies and different foods, talking to them about, you know, trying different things, celebrating the small wins when they do try different things, allowing that to be messy at times and, you know, not being too concerned about waste because in the process of them learning, they have to be able to kind of, you know, dive in with their hands kind of thing. Routine and structure are incredibly important. It's really good if kids arrive at a meal hungry. So, if there's been too much snacking during the day that can interfere with their appetite and that makes it sometimes harder for them to be willing to try new foods. Also, we really encourage parents to get kids involved. So have them, you know, participate in the process of putting the food into bowls or bringing the food to the table or having some kind of a role when it comes to food preparation makes quite a big difference when it's time to actually, you know, put things in their mouth.

Nicole: We often find that involvement in the preparation, not only does it kind of make them feel more independent and proud, but they also get used to seeing those foods, smelling those foods as well. So, it adds to that kind of added exposure of those different senses that might not be taste, but the other senses that do play a role in whether kids eat or not eat foods.

Mikala: Yeah, that's exactly right. And I think it's also really important to give them some autonomy in terms of what they choose. So, another great tip that we often give parents is bring all the food to the table and allow the child to participate in the selection of what they're going to put on their plate. Because if everything you've put on the table is, you know, good, wholesome, healthy food, it's OK for them to have some play and some role there in in what they reach for. Because, you know, as long as they're saying that you're willing to try all things, that's a direction that they'll

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go in eventually, too. They just might start with a narrower field of interest to begin with, and that's completely fine. New foods need to be brought in, you know, slowly and without any pressure. One thing that, you know, is never a good approach is to pressurise or bribe or, you know, not allow a child to leave the table, for example, before they've eaten a particular food, because then you've moved away from it being about an enjoyable experience and you've made it a power battle. So, trying to keep that space as light and as fun as possible is our advice as well.

Nicole: Yeah, we often find that if it's a negative mealtime or a negative experience, then it starts to become a kind of a mental dislike or mental battle with that food rather than the actual taste or texture dislike of that food.

Mikala: Yeah, and we know that a two and a three-year-old love a battle, so it's always best if that food environment can stay away from that. Important process that they're going through of learning about their own boundaries and being assertive and having a say.

Nicole: Yeah, having that power of choosing not to eat foods can be quite fun. And so that that is definitely one of those developmental stages we're kind of talking about of why kids choose not to eat or eat food. But we just got to remember as parents that our role is to provide the food and then kids can choose what and how much to eat. And sometimes they will test the boundaries.

Mikala: That's exactly right. And another thing I think it's really important to add there is drinks. A drink can come with a whole lot of energy that even though there may be nutrients in the drink as well, for example, a glass of milk, that it can significantly interfere with the hunger cues. And it's those hunger cues that tend to make the process of feeding your kids a whole lot easier because they're, you know, reaching for and munching on food before they've really thought about it because they're really nice and hungry and ready for a good meal.

Nicole: And that's right. Kids are a lot better at listening to their hunger cues than adults. As adults, we can quite often push through our society cues and when we feel full, just keep eating. Whereas kids will often be a lot better with their hunger cues and stop eating when they're full. So those drinks can definitely inhibit how much they actually eat if they're matched with some food at the same time. So yeah, definitely keeping those drinks away from mealtime or maybe after after mealtime as a bit of a top-up. So, if a parent was to say to you, oh, but I've tried to serve broccoli to my child and they just don't like it, should they just give up?

Mikala: No, they definitely should not just give up. I think the best advice that we give is just keep on serving, just take the pressure away, accept that they may say no, you know, up to 20 times. But eventually, if it remains around, if they see you eating it, if it's available to them, they will reach for it again and they will enjoy it again. And I think there's a few really important points there. And one of them is don't label your child as disliking a certain food. If they've turned their nose up at broccoli and then you say, my child doesn't like broccoli and they have that awareness, then you've reinforced something that, you know, if you just don't pay too much attention to it, the time will come that they will reach for and enjoy that food again. And it might be that they taste mature or it might be that, you know, one day they're with one of their good friends who loves broccoli and they think, oh, well, if, you know, my friends enjoy it, I'll give it another go too. Or it might be that one day, you know, they start asking you what foods are good for, you know, running fast or strong bones or something that means more to them. And so then, you know, they start asking about what healthy foods are and reaching for things for those reasons as well.

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Nicole: Exactly. So, we just want to keep on serving, serving those vegetables. It might take a while for them to give it another taste, but the more they keep on seeing it, then the more they start tasting it, the more likely they're going to start liking or eating those vegetables. So particularly with some of our more bitter vegetables, it can take a few tastes before taste buds do get used to those foods. Especially we find that the case with kids or children because their taste buds are still maturing and getting used to those bitter foods.

Mikala: And we all know someone who, you know, loves tomatoes, but says, I never liked them as a child. But it is a really normal process that your tastes go through a maturation. And so, your children may not love something now, but they may grow to love it. And it might end up being one of their favourite foods.

Nicole: So, if we're talking about vegetables because as we've already kind of started discussing, vegetables can be quite that tricky food to introduce into children's day. It's often where we find the highest levels of picky eating or fussy eating when introducing new foods. What would some really practical tips or ideas that parents who are listening today can try over the next week or so to introduce some new vegetables into their kid's day?

Mikala: So, there's a few things, I mean, starting all the way back at when you go to the shops to buy food for the week, I would be getting kids to go and pick different veggies. So really encouraging them to have a look around and choose different things to put into the trolley so that they feel like that's something that they've really contributed and then they're therefore more inclined to actually want to try those veggies. I would get kids involved in actually preparing and cooking foods that contain veggies because the more they've had that buy-in, the more interested they're going to be in giving it a go. Similarly, if you grow a little veggie patch and you have some cherry tomatoes growing on a little vine, kids are really interested. They're more inclined to pick those and give them a try as well. And then we always support parents who grate the extra veggies into the bolognese sauce or grate some extra veggies into a muffin mix because getting extra veggies in any way that you can is great. But just make sure that whilst you're carefully funnelling all those veggies into those eating opportunities, that you're also serving them at the same time in their true form where kids can see them, smell them, taste them and actually learn what their food preferences are. Because if they don't actually get to pick up the vegetables and try them, they're never going to be able to distinguish between those tastes and actually realise, wow, I really love corn or carrots are my favourite. And then I suppose the other thing is serve it in lots of ways.

Don't give up. You know, if raw, crunchy carrot sticks just aren't the favourite, then try them steamed or roasted or make a carrot soup or try, we often say try one veggie five ways rather than five different vegetables. Because once you've found the way that they do enjoy eating their veggies, then they're actually more inclined to explore that same vegetable in different ways as well.

Nicole: Yeah, exactly. Just finding that way that your children will eat those vegetables because it does change that look, feel and taste. And they're really important reasons why kids choose to eat or not eat foods.

Mikala: So, yeah, actually, and that makes me think of one more point, Nicole, which is not limiting your child's experiences based on your own food preferences. We often hear parents say that their kids haven't tried avocado, for example, because they themselves really don't like the texture of avocado. So, we would say give them the opportunity to decide to try to decide to have that exposure. Just be careful not to put in part your own likes or dislikes onto their food journey.

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Nicole: Yeah, exactly. That's a really good point. So, if you could leave the listeners with a few key messages today, what would they be?

Mikala: They would probably be a few things that I've covered in the beginning. But basically, it's really normal. Just remember, this is a process that kids are going to go through, some to a lesser degree, some to a greater degree. Also, we've touched a lot today on those early years and, you know, some of the food fussiness that comes with emerging into being an eater. But it also is completely normal for this to occur later in the primary school years and for different reasons. And the way we approach it can remain the same the whole way along in that you want to keep it fun, keep it light, set a really good example and make sure that you continue to serve the foods that you want your kids to be eating, to give them every opportunity to widen that field and to get on board with enjoying a broad range of food.

Nicole: Yeah, exactly. There are some really great key messages to leave our listeners with. We know with fussy eating that it is such a huge topic and it can vary so much, particularly at different stages throughout childhood. So, we do hope to bring you more episodes on different parts of fussy eating in the future. So, if you do have any particular topics you would love to learn about, make sure you flick us a message or leave them in the podcast notes below. Otherwise, thank you so much for joining us today. We hope you really enjoyed the content. Please like, review and share and also drop us comments on what topics you would like to hear from us in the future.

Mikala: Thanks, everyone. Really lovely to have a chat.

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