

Managing sensory feeding issues with Gradual Exposure

Use Gradual Exposure to encourage your child to try new or non-preferred foods.

Eating is a complex experience with sensory information coming from sight, smell, sound, touch and taste. It can be hard and uncomfortable for some children to process this information, which may lead to food avoidance. If your child struggles to eat a wide variety of foods, Gradual Exposure may help.

What is Gradual Exposure?

Gradual Exposure involves slowly and gently introducing new and disliked foods overtime, so the child becomes more comfortable with those foods.

Before you start:

1. Make a list of all foods your child currently accepts.
2. Make a list of foods you would like your child to accept. (These should be similar to foods in Step 1)
3. Follow the guide below to gradually introduce new or non-preferred foods one at a time.
4. Do not skip steps unless your child has demonstrated success in the previous step.
5. Encourage exploration of the food but do not place any pressure on your child to eat the food.

A guide to Gradual Exposure

Step 1:

SEE Make the food visible in the kitchen. For example, place the food in the fruit bowl or place pictures of the food on the fridge.



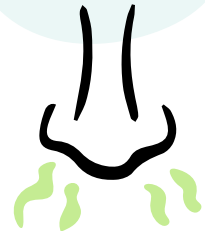
Step 2:

TOUCH Play with the food. For example, use cookie cutters to cut out shapes or count, sort or juggle the food.



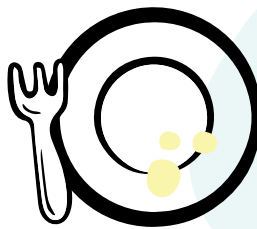
Step 3:

SMELL Encourage your child to smell the food by inviting them to help prepare or cook it.



Step 5:

LICK Work towards your child licking the food so they can feel more comfortable with it being near their cheeks, chin, nose and mouth. For example use the food as face paint.



Step 4:

BRING THE FOOD CLOSER Over multiple sittings, bring the food closer and closer to your child until they are comfortable with the food being on their plate.



Step 6:

BITE Work towards your child biting the food, then biting and holding the food in their mouth for a few seconds before spitting it out.

Step 7:

CHEW AND SWALLOW Work towards chewing and eventually swallowing.



SUCCESS!

Keys to success

- Food play should always be outside of mealtimes.
- Model target behaviours.
- Offer lots of praise as your child shows the target behaviours.
- Ignore unwanted or problematic behaviours as this might be seen as reward.
- Have as much fun as you can and don't be afraid to get messy.
- Persist. It can take children up to 15 attempts before they accept a new food.

Oral nutritional supplements may be recommended to help your child meet their nutritional needs.

For support with Gradual exposure, contact an Accredited Practising Dietitian.

PediaSure is a Food for Special Medical Purposes. Use under medical supervision.

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