

# Feeding Disorders

A temporary decrease in the amount of food a child will eat is very common when a child has a cold, experiences a change in his or her daily routine, or is trying a new food. However, your child may have a feeding disorder if he or she refuses to eat for an extended period of time and your child's weight is not in line with other children his or her age.

## SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

Typical signs and symptoms of feeding disorders include:

- Failure to eat that is not explained by a medical condition or by lack of available food
- Too little weight gain or a significant weight loss

## EVALUATION AND DIAGNOSIS

It is essential to diagnose feeding disorders early, because children will not grow and develop without appropriate nutrition. In addition, feeding disorders can also make it difficult for parents to



bond with their children. Diagnosis of a feeding disorder can be complicated because it requires both a medical and a mental health evaluation. A provider will look at medical, social, and behavioral factors to find out the cause of the feeding problem. A feeding disorder is typically diagnosed early in infancy, within the first 6 to 12 months. If you think your child has a feeding disorder, your child may need a feeding evaluation. For more information, turn to **MENTAL HEALTH EVALUATIONS (p39)**.

### TYPICAL CO-EXISTING DIAGNOSES

Common mental health diagnoses that co-exist with feeding disorders include:

- Anxiety Disorders (p48)
- Depression (p67)
- Reactive Attachment Disorder (RAD) (p86)
- Speech and Language Disorders (p90)

Your child may also have a medical problem that is causing his or her symptoms. Talk to your child's pediatrician about your child's symptoms.

### TREATMENT

Treatment may include different types of psychotherapy and training, as well as medical monitoring. The goal of treatment of a feeding disorder is to make meal time a more positive experience for the parent and the child. This will help the parent meet the nutritional, physical, and developmental needs of the child. Specific treatments may focus on improving mealtime structure, schedule, and limits; teaching parents successful eating approaches; making sure that parents are providing good food choices and variety; and helping to improve parent-child interaction patterns. For more serious cases, treatment should be team-based and could include the following providers: the child's pediatrician, a gastroenterologist, a psychiatrist, a psychotherapist, a nutritionist or dietician, a speech-language pathologist, and occupational and physical therapists. For more information on mental health specialists, turn to page 106 in **MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT**.



### RESOURCES

*How to Get Your Kid to Eat: But Not Too Much* (1987)  
By Ellyn Satter  
[www.ellynsatter.com](http://www.ellynsatter.com)

*Just Two More Bites!: Helping Picky Eaters Say Yes to Food* (2006)  
By Linda Piette

Pediatric Gastroenterology Clinic  
at Hasbro Children's Hospital  
401-444-8306  
[www.lifespan.org/hch/services/gi](http://www.lifespan.org/hch/services/gi)

## *Finding quality information on the Internet*

The Internet can be a great place to find information about children's mental health issues, but it can also be difficult to find quality information. The following information and tips are meant to help you decide what online information you can trust and what information could be false or misleading. Remember, no website should take the place of your child's pediatrician or mental health specialists! You should always discuss the information you find on the Internet with your child's mental healthcare providers.

Start your search for information using a reputable health information site. For a list of local and national websites, turn to page 198 in **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**.

If these sites don't provide the information that you are looking for, you can use a commercial search engine. A commercial search engine is a website like google.com or yahoo.com. These websites can be a great place to look for information. However, commercial search engines will also list websites that may provide incorrect information.

### **HELPFUL TIPS:**

1. If the site has an "About Us" section, click on it and read about the organization. This information will give you a better understanding of the people who are providing the information and what the purpose or mission of the organization is. If the website is not clear about who operates it, then you should question the quality of the information.
2. Is there a way to contact the organization that is operating the website? If it is difficult to contact the organization, then it may mean that the organization is not as credible as others.
3. When was the site last updated? This information is usually found at the bottom of the homepage. Sites that are a part of a large organization are updated frequently and should have a recent date listed on the page.
4. Does the organization mention where it gets the information on the site? A credible website should tell you the sources of the information.
5. There should not be ads posted on the website. The main purpose of a health information site should not be to sell you something. If there are ads, it means that the site is receiving money for advertising, which could bias the information.
6. You should not have to enter personal information to visit a site. If you are asked to—don't!

