FOR PANICKY PARENTS WITH FUSSY EATERS – Ten tips to keep you sane!

"My kids won't eat vegetables!"
"How can I get my toddler to eat new foods?"

Do the above phrases sound familiar to you? Do you have kids that are fussy, or unwilling to try new foods? Why not try our 10 golden rules?

1. Children are likely to mimic the eating habits of their parents, so set a good example. Eat healthy foods (and look like you are enjoying them!). Do not make disparaging comments about foods you don’t like. If your kids know you don’t like it, they will be less willing to try it themselves.

2. Kids have small stomachs, so small meals with snacks in-between are easier for them to handle than three big meals a day. Try not to pile food onto your children’s plates.

3. Children thrive on routine, so make sure to keep your mealtimes regular. Try serving the same meal a few times a week with a little variation once you find something that they really enjoy.

4. Bribes (such as ‘Eat you Brussel sprouts if you want ice-cream’) tend to backfire over time. Children may consume an unappetising food (or medicine) in order to obtain a reward, but that doesn’t mean that they will start to like the food. Such bribes can in fact cause children to intensely dislike the food they are being bribed to eat, and to increase their preference for the prize food.

5. Don’t fill your kids up on fluid (juice, milk, cordial, and even water) just before a meal. Their stomachs will feel full and they will not want to eat.

6. Kids tend to eat if they are allowed to serve themselves, or at least help with food preparation. Little ones can be involved in preparing a family meal with activities such as setting the table, calling everyone to the table, washing and tearing lettuce leaves, or timing the cooking with an egg timer.

7. For every food, there is almost always a substitute. If your children hate vegetables, offer them more fruit or legumes; if they won’t drink milk, buy yoghurt or cheese; if they dislike chewing meat, try mince dishes, chicken, fish or baked beans. Don’t give up on foods that are disliked – keep on trying every now and then to help your kids develop their tastes, even for disliked foods.

8. Don’t ignore problems that interfere with eating, such as teething, a sore throat, a blocked nose, or an upset tummy.
9. Keep offering new foods even if your kids reject them at first. They need to see and taste new foods several times before they become ‘familiar’ and are accepted.

10. Fussy eaters are often slow eaters who dawdle over their plates. Trying to hurry children to eat can cause them to become stressed, and put them off their food. Be patient, and let kids eat in their own time.

And remember: don't lose your cool at dinner! Simply remove left over food from the table (and perhaps offer it again)…. but don't let your kids have a snack an hour later!