



## Top Tips to Support Autistic Children and Young People with Restricted Diets or who Present with Food Avoidance.

- Do not coerce or pressure the child or young person to eat new food items. Allow them to take the lead in trying different food items when they are ready to do so.
- Do not offer rewards for trying new food items, as this can add pressure and increase anxiety.
- Provide preferred food at mealtimes to ensure they are getting adequate calorie intake.
- New food can be presented outside mealtimes, as part of a desensitisation programme.
- Keep mealtimes calm. Reduce social demands and sensory input.
- Ensure the child is comfortable at the table and ensure they have cutlery which they can handle and use.
- Offer choice at mealtimes, for example, have the preferred meal on the plate but another food on the table which the child/young person can try if they wish to do so.
- Involve the child or young person in food shopping and meal preparation so they become used to the smells, textures and sights of different food items.
- Encourage fun exploration and play with food such as games or baking. This will help develop positive experiences with new types of food.
- Do not 'hide' food within other food, for example, do not add carrot to mashed potato in an attempt to make the child or young person eat carrot.

