

DON'T FUSS!

(Written for "The Listener" by DR. H. B. TURBOTT, Director of the Division of School Hygiene, Health Department)

HERE are some further points about feeding difficulties in children. Nervous children are often faddy about their food, quite apart from any desire to make a fuss. They seem to want certain foods. So long as the daily diet is kept balanced, there is no harm in granting a child's wish for a particular food. Regularity of meals is important, and attempts should always be made to have food looking dainty and attractive, and to have a reasonable variation to meet individual preferences from time to time. Don't worry over the exhibition of preferences, and don't discuss them in front of the child.

Threats and punishments should never be used at mealtimes. Some food may be eaten as a result, but the upset—the opposition, the crying, and the temper—will spoil the food's value. Adult or family rows at meal-time will cause loss of appetite in a child. There should be no quarrelling, no saving up of reprimands for mealtime. The strain will spoil the meal. Nor should children be checked continually at mealtimes for bad table manners, or told to sit up straight, or so on. Make mealtimes a happy, carefree time.

When a child is learning to eat, he is clumsy, and spills and messes are usual. There should be no remarks about this. In fact, it is wise to let children eat alone until they have learnt to feed themselves nicely; it also saves them from becoming too much a centre of attention, and from being distracted by the grown-ups and their talk.

Some young children make a habit of eating all manner of things, even coal or dirt. Don't worry about this, unless it goes on into the fourth or fifth year. It is just that the child doesn't understand why everything may not be put in the mouth or even swallowed. It doesn't mean the child has worms. If he happens to have them, it's just a coincidence. Gentle training by removing the offending article without drawing the child's attention to it too much and substitution of something harmless that can't be swallowed, soon cures the habit. Children quickly learn to eat only those things with a pleasant taste.

Sometimes a child will keep food in the mouth with little or no attempt at chewing and swallowing. After holding the mouthful for quite a long time, he may spit it out. This is just a bad habit developed to draw attention. Fuss on the part of the father or mother is usually responsible. Over-solicitude about the child's food, over-anxiousness on the part of the one feeding him is sensed and appreciated by the child. Holding food in the mouth, or repelling it, is just one habit developed to attract more notice. He knows his mother wants him to eat, he refuses; he gets double the time and care, and even though he may be scolded, he puts up with that to focus attention on himself. The cure is to leave him alone at his meals.

Proper child feeding requires regularity, attractive balanced meals, tons of patience, and no fuss at all. No child comes to any harm by refusing to eat—harm comes from adults creating interest and attention. Don't fuss!

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