

Eating

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NHS Foundation Trust

Top Tips!

for parents of children with
sensory issues



- Your child might be sensitive to smells or noises and prefer eating in a separate room to others
- Check your child is sitting comfortably and their feet can touch the floor. If they can't, they may need a step to rest their feet on
- Your child might prefer to separate different foods and use a dividing plate
- A visual distraction like watching TV could help them cope with the sensations of eating
- Remember that your child might need to snack regularly to keep their energy levels up

New foods



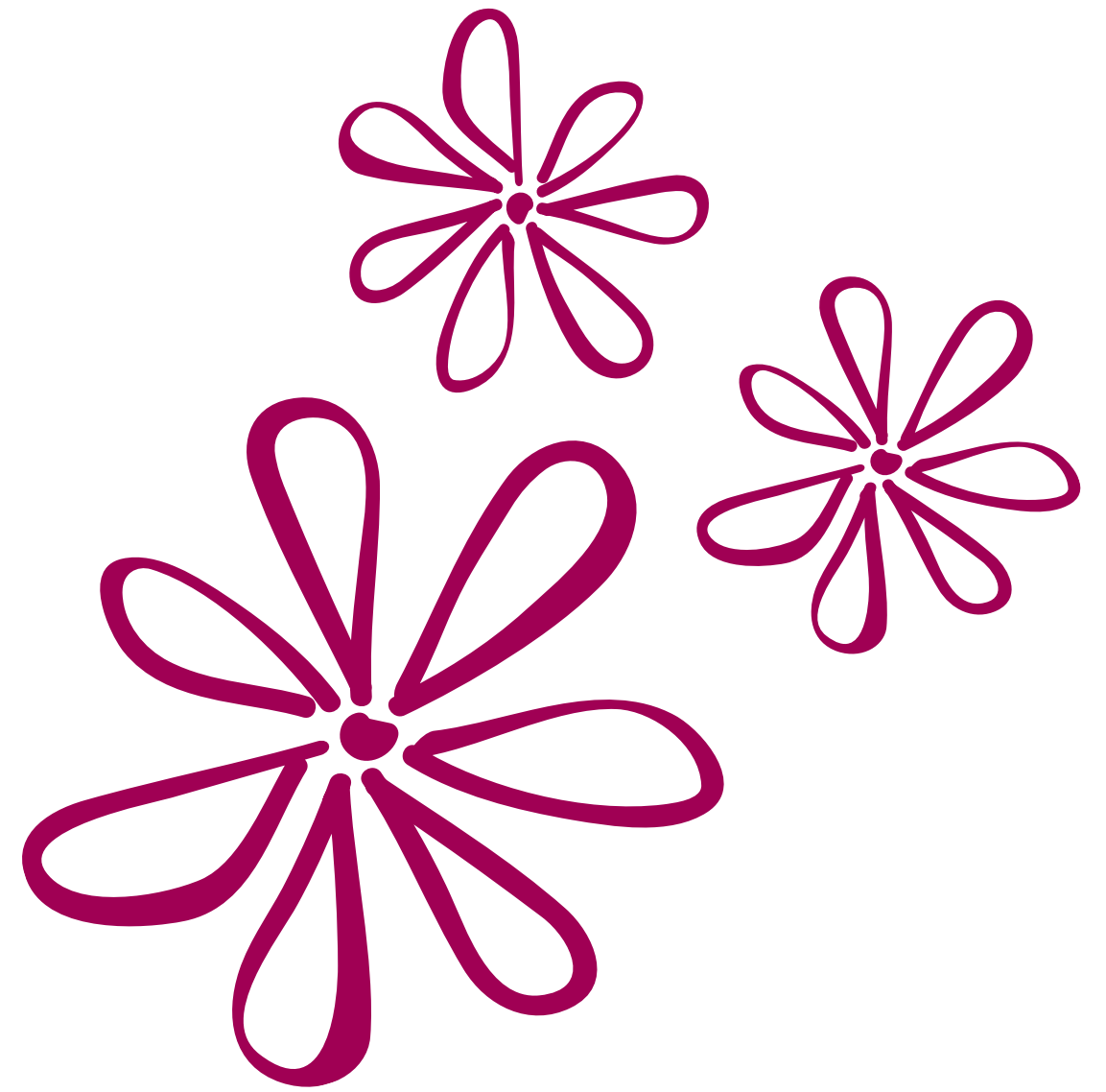
- Try not to introduce new foods too quickly. Let your child see it, touch it, taste a tiny bit, chew it, spit it out or swallow it
- Use a reward chart for new foods, but try not to make a fuss whether your child eats or not

Coping with smells

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- If your child wants to smell something inappropriate, help your child find an essential oil or fragrance that they like
- Put it on a handkerchief or their shirt collar
- Tell them to smell this when they come across a smell they dislike

Good smells

Try using some of these smells to see if your child likes them:

- | | |
|------------|---------------|
| • Lavender | • Peppermint |
| • Jasmine | • Cinnamon |
| • Citrus | • Rosemary |
| • Pine | • Ylang-ylang |



Calming

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down and sleep

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- Try the 'steam roller' technique on your child. Firmly roll a gym ball over your child's back when they are laid down on their tummy
- Slowly roll the ball up and down their back, arms, hands, legs and feet
- Encourage your child to kneel at the gym ball, elbows on the ball, head on hands to watch TV. They will naturally rock themselves

At bedtime



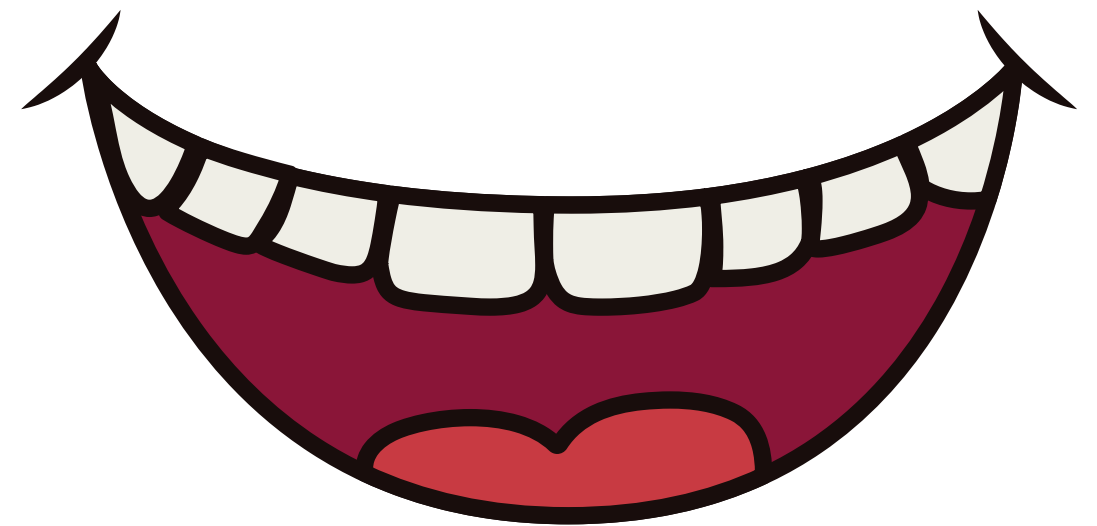
- To calm their body and prepare for sleep, give your child a firm stroke and squeeze down their back, arms and legs
- Consider using heavier bedding. This will give your child added pressure through their body to help them feel calm and settled for sleep.
- Have a consistent bedtime routine and a calm environment

Chewing

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- Chewing and sucking can aid concentration and reduce anxiety
- If your child is chewing, make sure it is on something clean and safe
- Don't ask your child to stop chewing without offering an alternative to them like a 'chewy tube' or 'chewellery'
- Sucking a drink through a straw or sports bottle gives more sensory feedback than drinking from a cup



Nails and skin

Lots of children bite their nails and the skin around their nails when they're anxious. Find out what they're worried about. It might stop the biting. If it doesn't...

- Reward if they can grow their nails
- Keep their hands busy with something to fidget with, such as a fidget spinner

Screening out distractions

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- Try ear defenders for children who are sensitive to noise but only use them for short periods of time
- A privacy screen on your child's desk can reduce visual distractions.



Coping with overload

- Retreating into a 'den' can help children calm down after a sensory-loaded day at school
- For example, a sheet over some dining chairs can create a safe and quiet area. Pop some cushions and a favourite toy inside. It can be a space for them alone



Showering and bathing

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- Stay calm. If you're calm, then your child will be calmer too
- Have a flannel ready on the side of the bath. Tell your child it's for wiping their face whenever they need to
- Give your child some control by letting them have the shampoo on their hand to rub it in. Let your child hold the shower head or jug for rinsing or let your child lie in the bath to rinse their hair
- Use a simple body diagram to encourage independent step by step washing e.g. face, arms, ears etc
- Try using goggles in the shower!



Going swimming

- Go when the pool is quiet
- Encourage your child to get their face and body wet as soon as possible, to help them get used to splashes.
- Encourage your child to practice wiping the water off their face

Good sitting

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Top Tips!

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- When your child is sitting on a chair, make sure their feet can touch the floor. If they don't, try using a step under their feet
- Movin' Sit cushions are great for children who tend to fidget
- Try a weighted lap pad to help your child feel grounded in their seat, this may help them to sit still



Gym ball

Sitting on a gym ball can help children who need to move, concentrate more. If your child is having problems sitting comfortably, it could be worth a try

Hair care

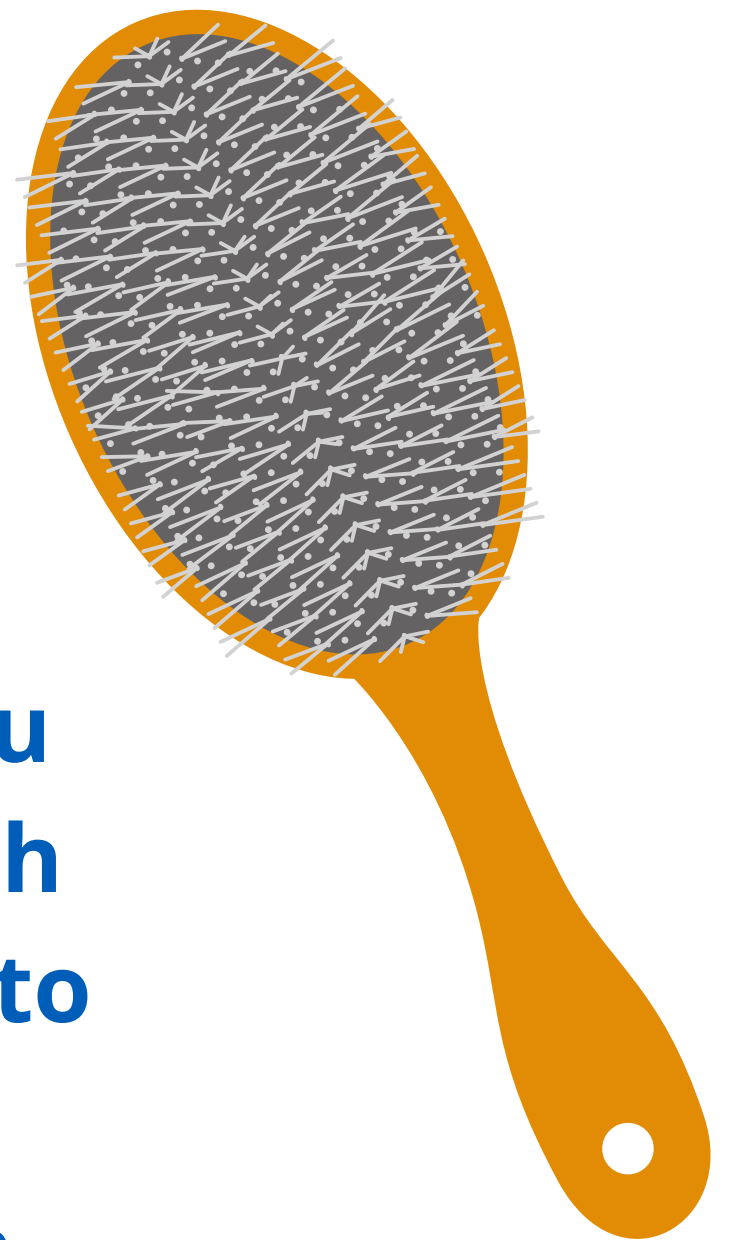
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Top Tips!

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- Give your child as much control as you can by letting them hold the hairbrush
- Try giving them a head massage first to desensitise the scalp
- Hold your child's hair while you brush to reduce pulling
- Agree how many brush strokes there will be and count together with your child
- Reward your child for brushing their hair



Hair cuts

- Find a friendly hairdresser who understands your child's difficulties
- Take a hand held fan with you to blow the trimmed hair away
- Use distraction techniques like taking a tablet computer with you
- Make an I-Spy sheet for all the things you'll see in the hairdressers
- Agree a time limit with the hairdresser and make sure they keep to it



Nail care

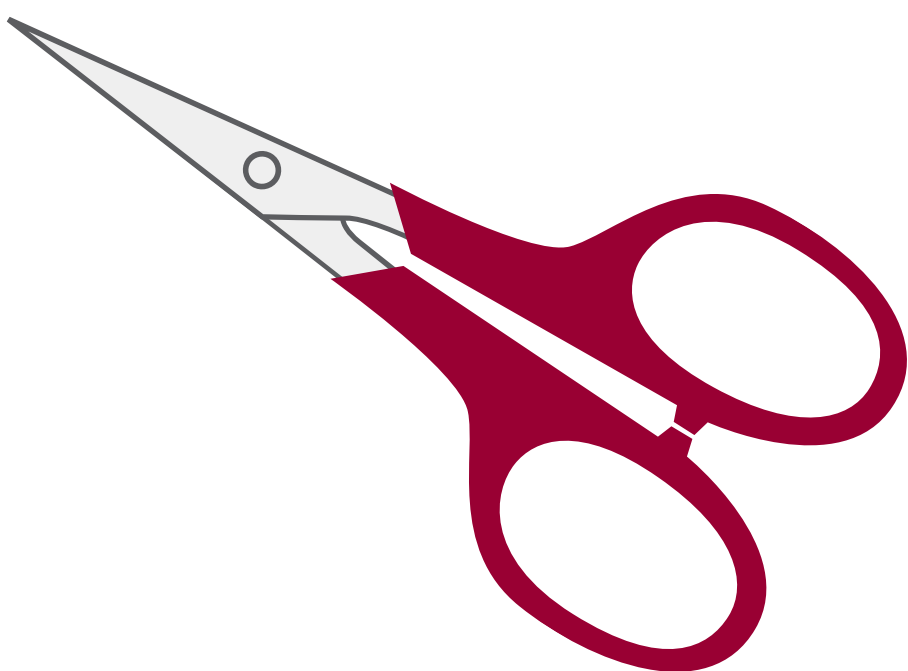
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- If your child is anxious, stay calm. It will help your child feel calmer too
- Try cutting nails while in the bath or under water when they are softer
- Try holding each toe or finger firmly as you trim the nail.
- If the clipping sound upsets your child, encourage them to wear ear defenders
- To reduce anxiety, let your child hold the clippers and pretend to trim their own nails. They don't have to cut if they're not able to
- Show your child how you cut your nails too
- If they are able to, let your child cut their own nails and finish them off with a file if needed
- But before cutting nails, try...



Massage

- Massage your child's hands and feet with cream first to desensitise them. Better still, your child could do this for themselves