

## Food Aversion and Kitchen Connoisseurs

Kitchen Connoisseurs is a nutritional/feeding class offered by FTS that will address the lack of such programs in Craven County and the surrounding areas for special needs children. Kitchen Connoisseurs will address the problem of food aversion with problem feeders. Many times, problem resistant eaters are simply thought of as “very picky eaters;” this is not the case. Quite often, children are resistant eaters because of an underlying fundamental problem- usually oral-motor delay or sensory integration dysfunction-, which restricts food selection. These problems with food can become emotionally challenging and stressful to all involved- the child, the caretaker, and any others who join at mealtime. Furthermore, food aversions can lead to poor health. The foods many resistant eaters choose tend to be fried or sweet. With poor food choices, children will not get all the vitamins and minerals they require as they grow and develop.

Unfortunately, resistant eating has no single diagnostic test. The realization of a problem must come from caretaker observation. Often times these children have associated medical diagnoses, such as cerebral palsy, mental retardation, and autism, just to name a few. Consequently, medical doctors often address the primary medical diagnoses, but leave the associated problems, including feeding disorders, to the parents and therapists. These disorders have numerous symptoms and pathologies, including coughing and choking during meals, poor oral-motor skill acquisition, food refusals, and oral aversion just to name a few.

<p>Physicians and parents can identify these traits in <b>problem feeders</b>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Restricted range of foods (less than 20)</li><li>• Child falls apart or tantrums when presented with new foods</li><li>• Refuses entire categories of textures</li><li>• Adds new foods to diet in greater than 25 steps</li><li>• Gets burned-out on a food and will not add it back to diet</li></ul>	<p>Physicians and parents can identify these traits in <b>picky eaters</b>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Have a decreased variety of foods (less than 30)</li><li>• Able to tolerate new foods on plate, by touch, or by taste</li><li>• Eats at least one food from most food textures</li><li>• Adds new foods to repertoire in 15-25 steps</li><li>• Gets burned-out on a food, but adds it back to diet after 2 weeks</li></ul>
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Programs like Kitchen Connoisseurs help parents to deal with the various problems of food aversion and problem feeders, including children's tantrums associated with trying new foods. Kitchen Connoisseurs has five stages to help overcome the eating hurdle: Acceptance, Touch, Smell, Taste, and Eating New Foods. Each stage of sensory development for eating has an outlined treatment plan designed to achieve the goals of that particular stage. Each week's activities, additionally, will be centered on making healthy food fun. Since many resistant eaters tend to eat sweets and fried foods, we will introduce fruits and vegetable to their diet. Expanding the variety of foods that these children are willing to eat will be a great benefit in the long run, since less than one-third of adult Americans get the recommended amount of fruits in vegetables in their diets[1]. We try very hard to not only help these children with sensory integration related problems, but also to teach them the importance of good nutrition.

Our goals are that after a child's completion of the program, he/she will have increased the number of foods in his/her diet, and will also be willing to try new food items in the future.

In addition to increasing the variety of foods consumed, a second outcome of Kitchen Connoisseurs will be to educate participants and their families about healthy eating. We will teach the importance of good nutrition and eating according to the Food Pyramid. Unhealthy eating can lead to a number of diseases, including obesity, heart disease, eating disorders, and diabetes, which is a rising concern, especially in rural areas such as these. Statistics released from the NC Department of Health and Human Resources in May 2007 indicate that 4,437 public school children in North Carolina had been diagnosed with diabetes. Adding new foods and working to incorporate items from all of the food groups will help to alleviate this and other preventable medical problems resulting from an unhealthy lifestyle within Craven County and the surrounding areas.

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Some examples include:

- Give each child a whole food (orange, watermelon, avocado, cucumber, corn in the husk, apple) and discuss the textures of the outside. Cut open each food and count seeds. Pass the food around so all can experience the new food. Use the seeds to plant in a garden or in a small flowerpot.

- Play food bingo. Use plastic food as markers. Each time the child gets a match, they smell and hold the actual food item.
- Bite Art
  - Gather 3-5 foods hard enough to bite (apples, carrots, cucumbers, cheese, slice of bread, or a slice of lunch meat)
  - Bite into the food and show off the “Bite Art”

**If you think you have a problem feeder or even just a picky eater on your hands, or you need help getting your child to eat the right foods, please give us the chance to help. Our classes and lesson plans are well researched and professional. We are fully confident that our class can improve your child’s nutritional intake and make meal time more fun and certainly make it easier on the child and caregiver.**

Please feel free to contact our main office at (252)-672-8676 with any further questions!

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[1] According to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention