

MANAGEMENT OF FOOD JAGS

What are Food Jags? Some children, especially those with feeding difficulties, prefer to eat the same food prepared the same way every day or at every meal. This is known as a “Food Jag”. The main problem with food jags is that children will eventually get bored or burned out on these preferred foods. Once children with feeding difficulties shun the preferred foods they’ve been jaggging on, these foods are typically lost out of that child’s food range - permanently. They may then continue this process of eliminating foods until they have very few foods left in their food repertoire.

Preventing Food Jags: These are the ways to prevent food jags and the loss of foods:

1. **Offer any one particular food ONLY every OTHER day** (i.e. NOT every day)
2. If the child does not have a wide enough food range to eat 3 different foods at each of 5 meals across the course of 2 days, then you must change at least one sensory property within the preferred food EVERY time you serve that food; shape, color, taste, texture, temperature. Below are some ideas about how to change the sensory properties (do each type of change for 2 weeks before moving onto the other type of change – **in order** as listed below):
 - ☞ **Changing Shape:** cut the food into different forms than it is usually presented. Using cookie cutters is an excellent and fun way to do this.
 - ☞ **Changing Color:** add food coloring to the favorite foods
 - ☞ **Changing Taste:** add a new flavoring to the food, such as using spices (dill, lemon, garlic, salt, tarragon) or extra butter, flavored Pam, or parmesan cheese. Add flavored syrups or jellies, soy sauce, tomato sauce, Jello powders, gravy or dried soup powders
 - ☞ **Changing Texture:** add a thickening agent such as corn starch, Thick-It; add an extra egg to cooking; add extra oil to cooking mixtures; cook the food into a different texture (e.g. making an omelet vs. fried eggs)

An Example: Johnny likes pancakes and wants to eat them every morning (and only them) for breakfast. If Johnny refuses all other foods and falls apart without his pancakes, his Mother would offer them BUT she would change something about them each day as follows:

Week 1 - change the shape (have Johnny cut his pancakes with cookie cutters that are different every day until he will allow the pancake to be presented by Mom already cut into a different shape)

Week 2 - change the color each day (have Johnny help cook the pancakes and add a food coloring. If he doesn’t understand that food coloring doesn’t change taste, you may have to have his experiment with changing the color of water with food coloring and tasting that there is no flavor change)

Week 3 - change the taste and the texture slightly by adding an extra egg one day, and extra oil the next (alternating days until both are tolerated well)

Week 4 - change the flavor of the pancakes clearly by adding flavored syrups or different jelly on different days

Week 5 - change the taste and texture by adding real pieces of fruit to the pancakes

The Just Noticeable Difference: At first, a child may be quite resistant to any type of change in their preferred food. They may notice even very small differences in any of the food properties. The goal is for you to change the food enough that a Just Noticeable Difference is noted by the child. This Just Noticeable Difference should NOT be so large that your child has a meltdown and refuses to eat. The size of the Just Noticeable Difference that can be tolerated is different for every child. You will need to experiment to find what your child can tolerate by first changing a property of the food in a small way (in the order listed above). Your child should act like they noticed, BUT ARE OKAY, with the change. If they fall apart, you made too big of a change and you need to back down and change the food less next.