



## Dietary Advice for Hyperphagia

### What is Hyperphagia?

Children with hyperphagia have an appetite which cannot be satisfied. This can be described as an intense and persistent sensation of hunger. In the longer term, an excess intake of food can lead to difficulties maintaining a healthy weight and this in turn can cause problems associated with carrying excess weight. You may notice some of the following habits in your child:

- ✚ Your child may complain of hunger all the time.
- ✚ Your child may never appear to feel satisfied/full.
- ✚ You may notice your child is obsessed with food e.g., always talking about food or needing to know when their meals or snacks will be.
- ✚ Your child may “steal” food or eat inappropriate foods such as other people’s leftovers, food scraps or even take food from the bin.
- ✚ You may notice your child getting up overnight and looking for or eating food.
- ✚ They may take large bites of food or eat very quickly.

### Dietary Suggestions for Hyperphagia

#### 1. It is important to ensure that your child’s diet is healthy.



Following the principals in the Eat Well Guide will help to ensure your child is achieving a nutritionally balanced diet. Your Dietitian can help you to see where changes can be made to your child’s diet and assess their current intake.

#### 2. Protein foods can be helpful in improving feelings of fullness.

Foods such as beans, lentils, pulses, eggs, nuts and seeds, fish, and meat take longer to be digested by the body and therefore keep us feeling fuller for longer.



#### 3. High fibre foods also help with feelings of fullness.



Fruits, vegetables, nuts, seeds, as well as beans, lentils and pulses are all great sources of fibre. Boosting intake also supports weight management as we cannot digest all the calories from fibre.



4.

#### 4. Ultra-processed foods (UPFs) can make hyperphagia worse.

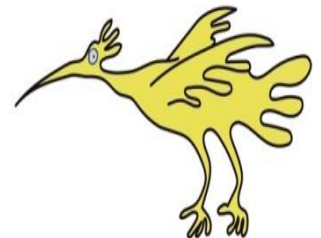
UPFs typically contain 5 or more ingredients and contain ingredients such as preservatives, emulsifiers, sweeteners and artificial colours or flavours. Ensuring that your child's diet contains lots of fresh ingredients, and UPFs are kept to a minimum, may be helpful. It is important to remember that not all processed foods are unhealthy, but as with general healthy eating advice, overall dietary balance and variety is key.

Non-ultra-processed food examples		Ultra-processed food examples	
<i>Try to eat these foods often</i>		<i>Try to have these food less regularly or as treats</i>	
Fruit	Pasta	Ice cream	Breakfast cereals
Vegetables	Rice	Ham	Biscuits
Eggs	Potatoes	Sausages	Carbonated drinks
Plain Meat/Fish	Milk	Crisps	Fruit-flavoured yogurts
Beans	Cheese	Mass-produced bread	Instant soups
Lentils/Pulses	Plain yogurt	Instant noodles	Sweets/chocolate

#### 5. Limit food exposure

Hyperphagia can cause anxiety for your child. Ensuring your child is not overexposed to food can help them to feel calmer. Practical tips include:

- ✚ Keeping food in cupboards rather than out on the side in the kitchen.
- ✚ Locking cupboards and/or fridges and freezers to help your child to avoid eating outside of planned meal or snack times.
- ✚ Preparing a daily snack box so children know what they can eat. Parents can then limit intake to healthy snacks.



#### 6. Plan meals and snacks

Children should have regular meals and may need snacks in-between these meals depending on age, activity level and hunger. Planning out meals and snacks for the week can help you feel more organised and lessen stress around food.

Using visual timetables or a 'Now and Next' meal board can help children to know when to expect their next meal or snack and importantly help them understand when it is not time to eat. This can help with setting boundaries around food. Children should create/decorate these timetables with their favourite characters or subjects that interests them to feel ownership over them.

Now	Next	Then
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Now	Next	Then
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Department of Nutrition & Dietetics

Chew More!

Put your cutlery down  
in between bites!

Drinks lots  
of water!

Turn off screens  
while eating!



## 7. Slow down eating

Slowing down eating can help to allow your child's food to reach their tummy and improve their feeling of fullness by the end of the meal. Practical tips include:

- ✚ Chewing more – count how many times you chew your food and aim to double it.
- ✚ Eating high fibre foods that need lots of chewing such as vegetables, fruits, and nuts.
- ✚ Putting your knife and fork down between mouthfuls will help to slow down your eating
- ✚ Setting a timer for 20 minutes and try your best not to finish your meal before the buzzer goes off. Aim for a slow, consistent pace throughout the meal.



## 8. Turn off your screen

Avoiding electronic devices during mealtimes will help your child to eat more mindfully.

This means they will be enjoying their meal and focusing on their food rather than being distracted by their screen. Evidence suggests that eating whilst distracted can increase the amount of food eaten and reduce feelings of satisfaction from food. Eating with family members and chatting about your day during the meal can help the meal to last longer as well and has shown to be protective against the development of obesity.

## 9. Drink water

Drinking water before meals and snacks will help to feel fuller by the end of the meal. Try to have plain water or sugar-free drinks.

## 9. Mindful Eating

Encourage your child to focus on the food they are eating. You can encourage this by asking questions such as, 'what colours can you see on your plate?', 'what can you smell?', 'what are you going to taste first?', 'what does that texture feel like in your mouth?' and 'how long can you feel the food before it disappears into your tummy?' etc. The goal is to bring awareness to what is being eaten and to tune into the hormones that signal fullness. Please note: this may be an ineffective strategy for autistic children or children with additional needs.

### Useful Resources

<https://www.bda.uk.com/resource/healthy-eating-for-children.html>

<https://www.bda.uk.com/resource/mindful-eating.html>

<https://www.bda.uk.com/resource/fibre.html>