

Self-Care for Caregivers

Your own wellbeing will play a role in how you care for your child. It will also influence how you manage mealtimes and feeding behaviours.

Every child is unique and as a result caregivers experience both the joys and challenges of their individual styles! This includes mealtimes!



Stress and Stressors:

Stress is a normal and necessary part of life for everyone. It can help prompt us to action and alert us to potential problems. Stress can come from a wide range of places, such as:

- Relationships
- Work
- Financial concerns
- Parenting
- Life events such as planning a holiday or birthday party
- Day to day tasks

Symptoms:

Some people are able to pinpoint exactly what causes or contributes to feelings of stress. Others, may not notice when they are stressed. Some signs of stress may be:

- Poor sleep
- Worry or anxiety
- Irritability or feeling 'moody'
- Muscle tension
- Appetite changes



If stress is too frequent and at high levels persistently, it can start to impact on your quality of life. This is because the symptoms start to affect how well you feel and your ability to communicate with others. For parents or caregivers, stress can influence how you cope with day to day tasks.

This is particularly relevant to mealtimes when you may feel pressured or face a lot of demand to cater to your child's needs.

Common feeding stressors:

It is important to remember that you probably already have developed strategies or solutions to manage your child's feeding behaviours or sensory needs. The aim of this group is to add to your toolbox and help problem solve some of the persistent issues.

Families commonly share that specific stressors can make mealtimes harder to cope with:

- Different opinions amongst family members on feeding approaches.
- Meals outside of the family home.
- Introducing novel foods from specific food groups (e.g. vegetables or protein)
- Setting up a different mealtime environment.
- Siblings or family members with different feeding styles.
- Volume concerns

It may be helpful to spend some time thinking about what potential mealtime stressors you have noticed. You can think in the group about the potential solutions.

Understanding your stress cues

It's important to understand how stressed you might be feeling as this will impact on how well you are able to try a new strategy and how well your child responds to it. Think about your *hot cross bun* and which area you might be able to target to help cope

Management Tips

- Identify your stressors
- Eat and sleep well (as well as your routine allows)
- Take time out to do the things you enjoy (as a family, with friends and on your own)
- Use relaxation exercises.
- Problem solving techniques
- **Remember the exceptions!** There will be times when mealtimes are easier than expected. Noticing the achievements when they happen is important. You & your family are doing your best and it's important to acknowledge that.



If things feel too overwhelming, there are many services able to support you. Talk with your GP or ask us and we will help point you in the direction of services such as **Wandsworth IAPT**, an NHS adult therapy service.