

# Feeding tips for autistic children

Making mealtime both peaceful and nutritious for these children can feel like an uphill task.

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Getting any child to eat a balanced diet can be quite a challenge. However, this becomes harder with autistic children. Julius Oyeyo, an occupational therapist with Tunaweza Children's Centre says: "Some of them have got sensory sensitivities, avoid certain tastes, smells and textures, and need a more rigorous need for routine

and structure." He adds that more importantly, problem eating behaviour can prevent them from getting the nutrients they need, thus worsen their symptoms.

## Dairy

"Autistic children need not be fed on gluten (wheat and wheat products), milk and other dairy products as they contain casein, a slow-digesting protein that prevents excessive protein breakdown).

Florence Namaganda, a neuro-paediatric therapist, founder and director of Special Children's Trust says, "The ideal foods for autistic children include fruits, vegetables, nuts and fish. They



Give them mostly healthy foods including fruits and vegetables.

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both you and the  
baby.



should also take oils such as olive and coconut oil.”

Joanne Katushabe, a mother to an autistic child, says: “Naturally, I am not a sweet tooth, so it was easy not to expose my son to sweet things. He is eight years old now and only takes soda once a week,” she says, adding, “While he eats pretty much everything, I limit the sweets and biscuits to regulate his sugar intake.”

While the guidelines given above are generalised, Oyeyo says not all children with autism are negatively affected by foods not recommended for children with autism. “The therapist takes the child off a certain diet as they monitor the associated behaviour (hyperactivity, high energy levels, and screaming among others,” he says. However, when behaviour such as aggression, hyperactivity and destruction are noticed during the first assessment, he says, “We will withdraw some foods and monitor the frequency and intensity of their behaviour and then evaluate if there are any correlations.”