



## Occupational Therapy Advice and ideas for managing Pica

Pica is an eating disorder categorised by repeated eating of non-food items. Children with Pica can be observed eating items such as grass, dirt, play doh, paper, hair or faeces.

There are a number of reasons why a child might seek out these non-food items including:

- Nutritional deficiencies
- Sensory seeking behaviours
- Poor understanding of food and non-food items

### When there is a nutritional deficiency

It is important that children are seen by the GP/ Paediatrician in all cases for support and a diagnosis. A blood test will usually be taken to confirm a nutritional deficiency and vitamins may be prescribed.

Children with Autism and sensory processing difficulties are more likely to present with Pica, which may be due to selective diets and sensory needs.

When a child presents with selective eating, it can be helpful to work on exploring new foods and textures through sensory play.

### For sensory seeking behaviours

When particular textures are sought out in non-food items, these textures should be replaced where possible with edible alternatives.

Sensory play and sensory trays in the classroom should be edible where possible as well. These can support with tactile development, and pre-writing skills.

Ideas could include:

- Dry cereal
- Crushed Weetabix
- Mashed potato
- Cooked (and dyed) pasta
- Custard
- Cream
- Jelly



# Fox Wood School

Woolston Learning Village, Holes Lane, Woolston  
Warrington, WA1 4LS



01925 811534  
[FoxWood\\_School@sch.warrington.gov.uk](mailto:FoxWood_School@sch.warrington.gov.uk)  
[www.foxwoodschoo.org.uk](http://www.foxwoodschoo.org.uk)

Always check allergies and dietary requirements when preparing edible sensory play activities.

Chew toys and oral motor activities can also help, particularly when the non-food items are firm or crunchy as this will provide lots of feedback to the muscles around the mouth and jaw.

Oral motor activities could include:

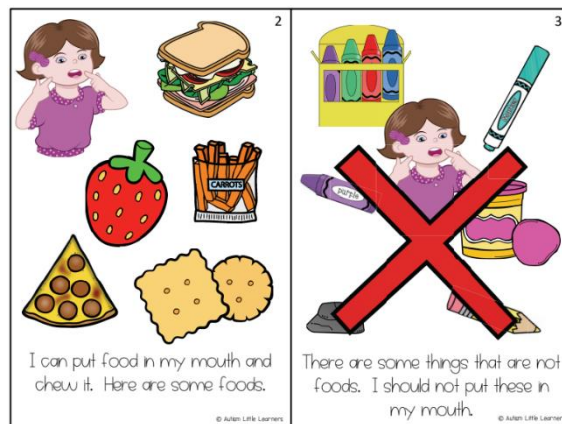
- Pulling silly faces in the mirror
- Blowing bubbles or paper whistles (easier)
- Cheek massage
- Use of vibrating toothbrush around the cheeks



To support understanding

Always try to redirect children towards chew toys or edible alternatives when they are seeking out non-food items.

Social stories can be found online to help support understanding of food and non-food items.



Written by:

Anita Bartlett  
Specialist Occupational Therapist  
Fox Wood School

Headteacher: Miss Lucinda Duffy NPQH, BA.Ed QTS

Deputy Headteacher: Mrs Lianne Buchanan NPQH, BA (Hons), QTS, MA SEN

