We are happy to announce that we are now a panel approved service with the Better Start Initiative, and as a result, families with a child up to age 7, with a diagnosis of DownsSyndrome, Cerebral Palsy, Vision or Hearing Impairment and Fragile X may be able to use their funding at our service.

Food Preferences
By Melinda Werder OT @ RSG!OT

As OT’s we are often asked to assist children who only eat a limited range of foods. Often the range of foods they do eat show definite preferences, patterns or similarities based on the sensory properties of the food eg. all food of a certain colour, taste, texture.

Restricted food preferences may limit the nutritional input a child’s body and brain receives which may then in turn impact on their health, energy and activity levels, learning, play and behaviour.

OT’s are able to assist with increasing this repertoire by providing generalised strategies or conducting feeding sessions with a child.

Children may process one or more of the sensory properties of foods differently to other children their own age and may therefore end up with a limited range of foods they are able to tolerate consistently. For example, they may or may not like:

- the visual representation of food (eg. foods with certain labels, shapes or colours),
- the auditory property (eg. whether the food sounds noisy or soft when they are chewing),
- the taste (eg. sweet or salty or bland foods), the texture (eg. on their lips, face, hands, tongue, teeth),
- the smell, or
- the effort the food may take to prepare to swallow (eg. if the food is chewy, shatters, dissolves etc). For this latter issue, consultation with a Speech Pathologist may be useful.

At Ready, Set, Go! OT many of the team members have trained in the SOS approach to feeding/food preferences developed by Kay Toomey (Paediatric Psychologist) and Erin Ross (Speech Pathologist). During sessions many of the principles and strategies from this approach are incorporated to help children master the skills required to try and consume new foods.

Some of the strategies used from the approach include, that therapists might try with your child and that you can also try:

- **Food play** and play-based approach to increase interactions with food (making faces with food, using different cookie cutters, pretending to tip over towers with tongue, pretend play, such as chewing like a tiger on back teeth etc).
- **Using a checklist** (touch, smell, look at, listen to, taste) for interacting with food.
- **Presenting already consumed foods in new ways** eg. potatoes cut into circles instead of chunks.
- **Identifying foods that wish to be introduced and creating links and similarities between the new food and already eaten foods** eg. grapes are the same colour as apples.
- **Looking through junk mail and identifying different types of foods** (as exposure and awareness to different types of food) and grouping these foods on similar shapes/colours.
- **Making shopping lists** with your child and have them help with shopping at the grocery store.
- **Involving your child in food preparation** and the cooking process.

For further information please contact one of our OTs.
Children often see a Paediatric OT for the following concerns:

**SELF CARE:**
- Toileting
- Sleeping
- Limited diet
- Dressing skills
- Getting ready in the mornings
- Organisation

**SCHOOL RELATED ACTIVITIES:**
- Writing
- Attention and Focus
- Reading and Visual Processing
- Gross Motor Skills
- Fine Motor Skills (scissors, hand dominance, hand strengthening)
- Sitting on the floor or at a desk
- Organisation and time management

**PLAY & SOCIAL SKILLS**
- Imaginative play skills
- Engagement and joint attention
- Turn taking
- Problem solving social situations
- Improving confidence and resilience
- Learning to be part of a group

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**Resources that Staff at Ready, Set, Go! OT love…**

**Food Face Plates- (Fred Brand)**
These are a range of dinner plates with basic faces on them. Children can add food to the plate to decorate the face. This encourages food play and we often suggest children move the food into position with their fingers so that they are receiving exposure to what the food ‘feels’ like.

**Just take a bite: By Lori Ernsperger & Tania Stegen-Hanson**
This is a helpful resource for parents who are wanting more information on children with eating challenges and food aversions.

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**Ready, Set, Go! OT NEWS**

Ready, Set, Go! OT welcomed in January **Nicola Cantoni** and **Kerryn Logan** to the team. Nicola has 5 years experience working in paediatric settings as well as the area of mental health. Kerryn comes to the team as a recent graduate from UQ, having previous experience in special school settings. Kerryn has been busy attending professional development seminars, whilst Nicola has taken on Tina’s caseload while she prepares for maternity leave.

Ready, Set, Go! OT will celebrate it's **5th birthday** in March. A big thank you to all the children, families and teachers who have made our past five years so enjoyable! The team looks forward to another 5 years!