



# Food Selectivity and Health Habits: How to Incorporate New Foods into Your Child's Diet

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# Who am I ?



- Matt Heininger -
  - Board Certified Behavior Analyst since 2015
- Worked with Autism population and other development disorders for over 13 years
- LA Regional Director at Butterfly Effects
- Butterfly Effects is a nationwide and leading ABA provider, servicing 25+ markets across 12 states

# Agenda



Demographics

Medical Factors to Consider and Evaluating Readiness

Overview of Effective Strategies

Q & A



## A Snapshot

- 90% of individuals with Autism present with feeding problems
- 70% are selective feeders
  - (Volkert & Vaz, 2010)
- Considered medically necessary if deemed “behavioral”



# A Daily Dose of Research

- Research shows that avoidance and escape by ending a meal period and caregiver/parent attention were most frequent factors maintaining feeding problems in children with Autism

## Why?



## Medical Factors to Consider

- Swallowing Problems
- Gastrointestinal Issues
  - Constipation
  - Reflux
- Textural Sensitivities
- Overeating tendencies
  
- And MANY more!



# Determining Need through Consultation



- Clinical Decision Making
  - Thorough medical consultation is needed, and supplemental assessments across various disciplines are highly encouraged and sometimes **NECESSARY** prior to starting a feeding program
  - This can include
    - Medical check-up from Pediatrician
    - Medical rule-out by a Neuropsychologists
    - Assessments by Occupational Therapists
    - Assessment by Physical Therapist
- It is very easy for suspected behavioral issues to be masked by other factors beyond the competence of your Board-Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA)

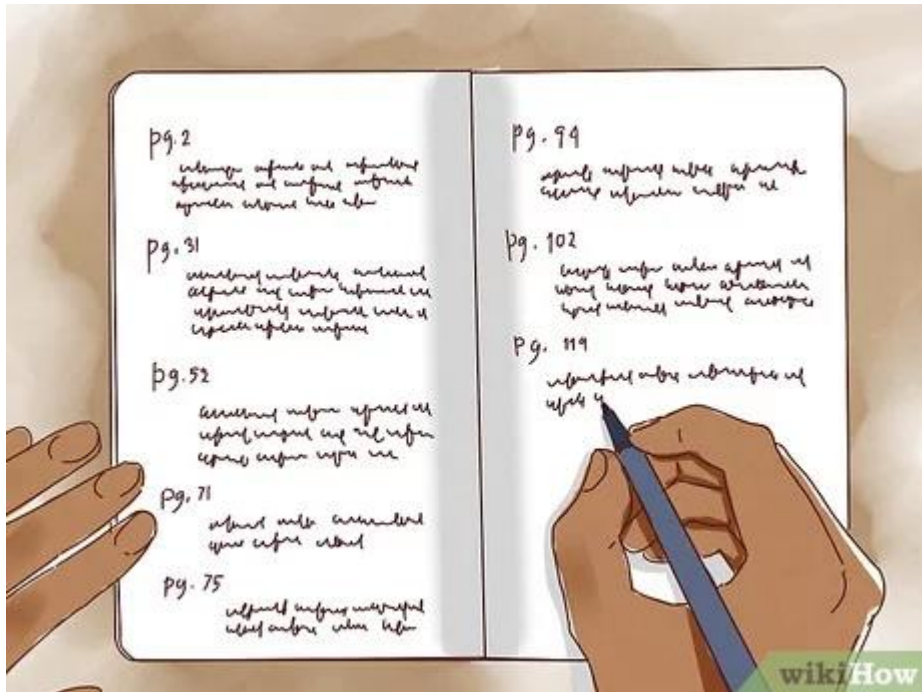
# Final Call: Assessing Readiness for Feeding



- If medical factors are ruled out, BCBA conducts an assessment which includes evaluating readiness skills that are needed to make a feeding program successful.
  - Gross motor skills
  - Attending skills
    - Sustained sitting
    - Visual scanning
  - Understanding first, then statements
  - Self Feeding via utensils



# First Steps: Log and Analyze



- Create a Food Log
  - All the foods that your child eats
  - Provides insight into the choices the child makes and trends
  - No new foods should be introduced at this time
- Analyze the Food Log
  - Is there a pattern in the food they are eating?
  - Are they similar in some way?
    - Color, texture, flavor, size, utensils needed, etc.

# Assessment Time!

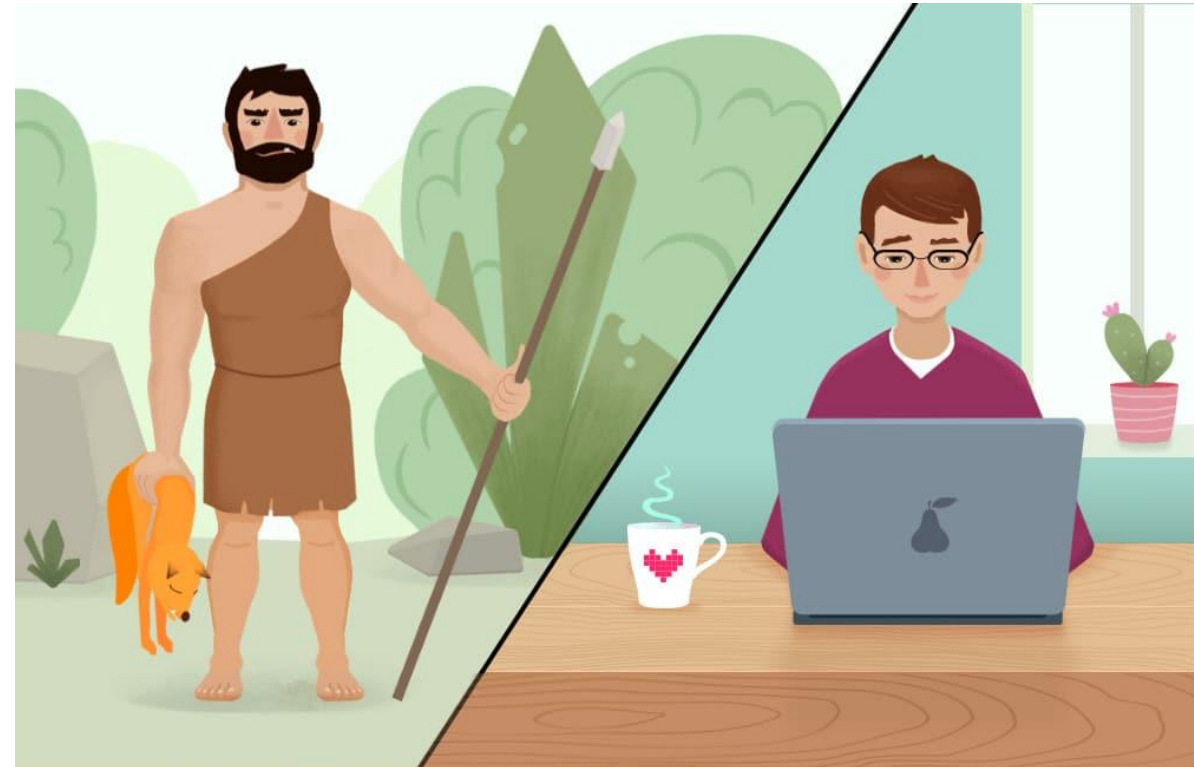


- BCBA will conduct a preference assessment
- Results will provide a hierarchy of preferred and enjoyable foods
- Will determine whether based on rigidity and patterns as to whether we start with preferred foods but presented in different way
- Will lead into effective treatment strategies

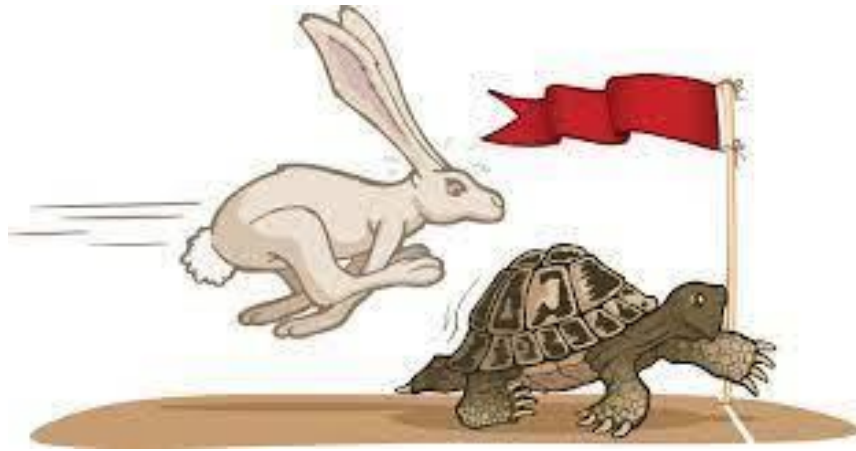


# A Related Thoughts

- How did humans become more selective of what we eat?
- AVAILABILITY!
- Preferences are based on what's available to us.



# Effective Strategies To Assist



1. Present enjoyable foods differently
  2. Blend preferred foods with non-preferred foods
  3. Gradual desensitization/fading in
  4. Choices
  5. First, then contingencies
- Key aspects:
    1. Exposure
    2. Modeling
    3. Creating Distinctive Meal Periods
    4. Positive Reinforcement!

# Closing Thoughts

- Feeding programs are incredibly difficult
- May result in temporarily placing other programs on hold
- Can be emotionally nerve racking with parents
- Consult with all professionals to targeting it in ABA therapy
- Once you start, **STAY STRONG!**



Thank  
you



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