



TAKE THE FUSS OUT OF FUSSY EATING: A MONTHLY WEBINAR FOR PARENTS

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Background

- Fussy eating (also known as picky eating or faddy eating) is a general term used to characterise an unwillingness to eat familiar foods or to try new foods. Fussy eating most commonly begins in early toddlerhood (12 to 24 months) and can be seen as being a normal stage of development.
- Many studies have shown that the majority of children will outgrow fussy eating without needing medical intervention.
- Despite this, fussy eating has been shown to cause significant parental anxiety and have a negative impact on family mealtimes. This anxiety may prompt the use of coercive feeding practices of pressure to eat or using rewards as incentives to eat. These strategies are not conducive to food acceptance and may prolong or worsen the picky eating behaviour.
- Dietitians are appropriately qualified to deliver education to parents on the management of fussy eating. Dietetic interventions have traditionally been delivered in a one to one setting or via in-person groups.
- The Health Service Executive has committed to increasing digital transformation to meet the needs of service users, with increased use of telehealth being a key area for expansion.
- This project aimed to assess the feasibility and acceptability of delivering first- line advice for the management of fussy eating via a webinar delivered by dietitians.



Results cont.

Thematic Analysis of Feedback:
Thematic analysis of the open question which asked participants to share the main message they took from the webinar revealed 5 main themes.

- Reducing pressure and stress at mealtimes** A significant theme that was identified from the responses was the emphasis on reducing pressure and stress during mealtimes. Many parents highlighted the importance of not forcing children to eat, creating a relaxed atmosphere, and avoiding negative feedback.
- Continued exposure to new foods** Another prominent main message that participants took was around the importance of repeated exposure foods without applying pressure.
- Reassurance and patience** Reassurance was also a key take home message for participants. Many expressed that they were comforted by knowing that fussy eating is often a normal phase.
- Positive mealtime environment** many participants took on the message about creating a positive mealtime environment. The webinar included information about practices like family-style meals, role modelling, and making mealtimes enjoyable rather than a battleground.
- Practical strategies and tips** Some participants took away messages about practical strategies, such as involving children in food preparation, using games to make mealtime fun, and offering a variety of foods without making a fuss

Figure 1: Numbers registered and attendees per month for first year of webinar.

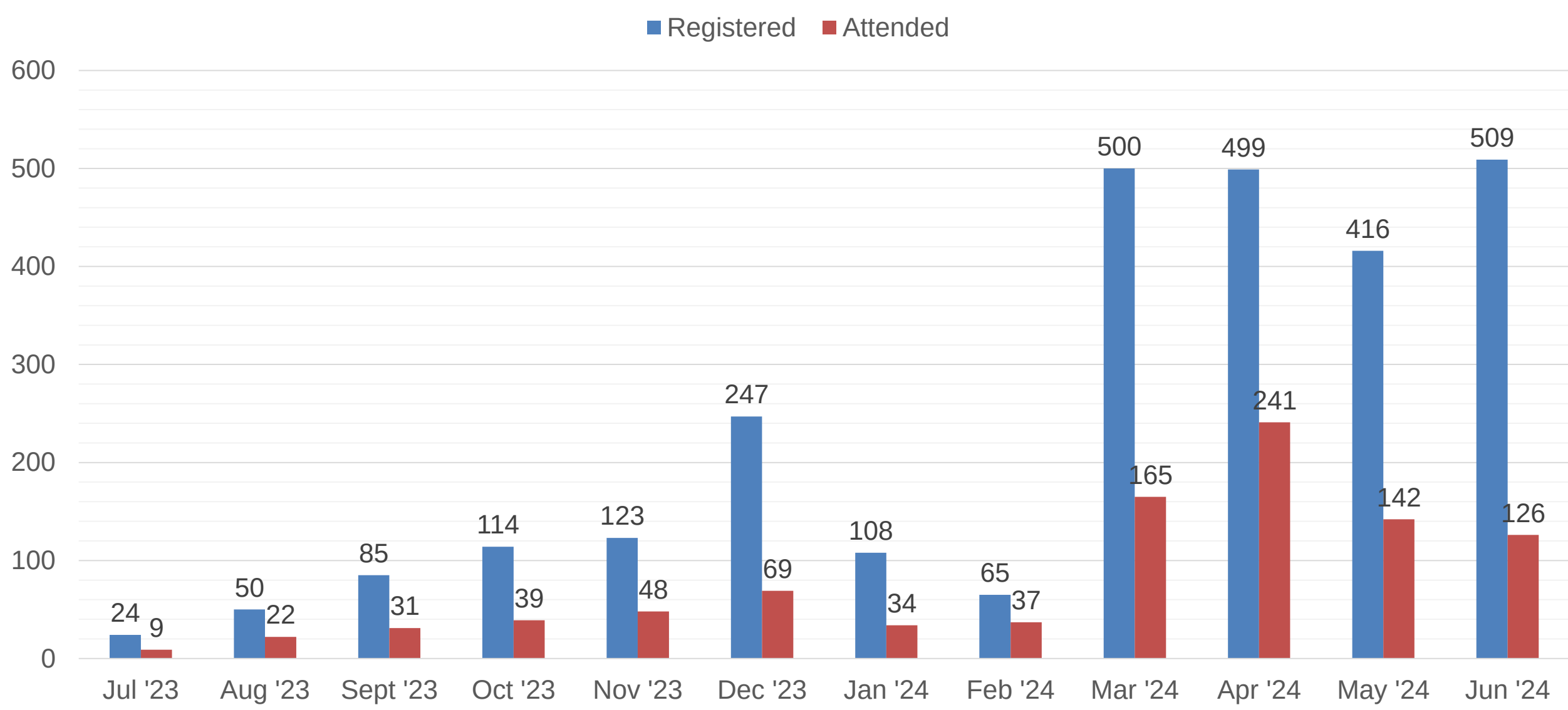
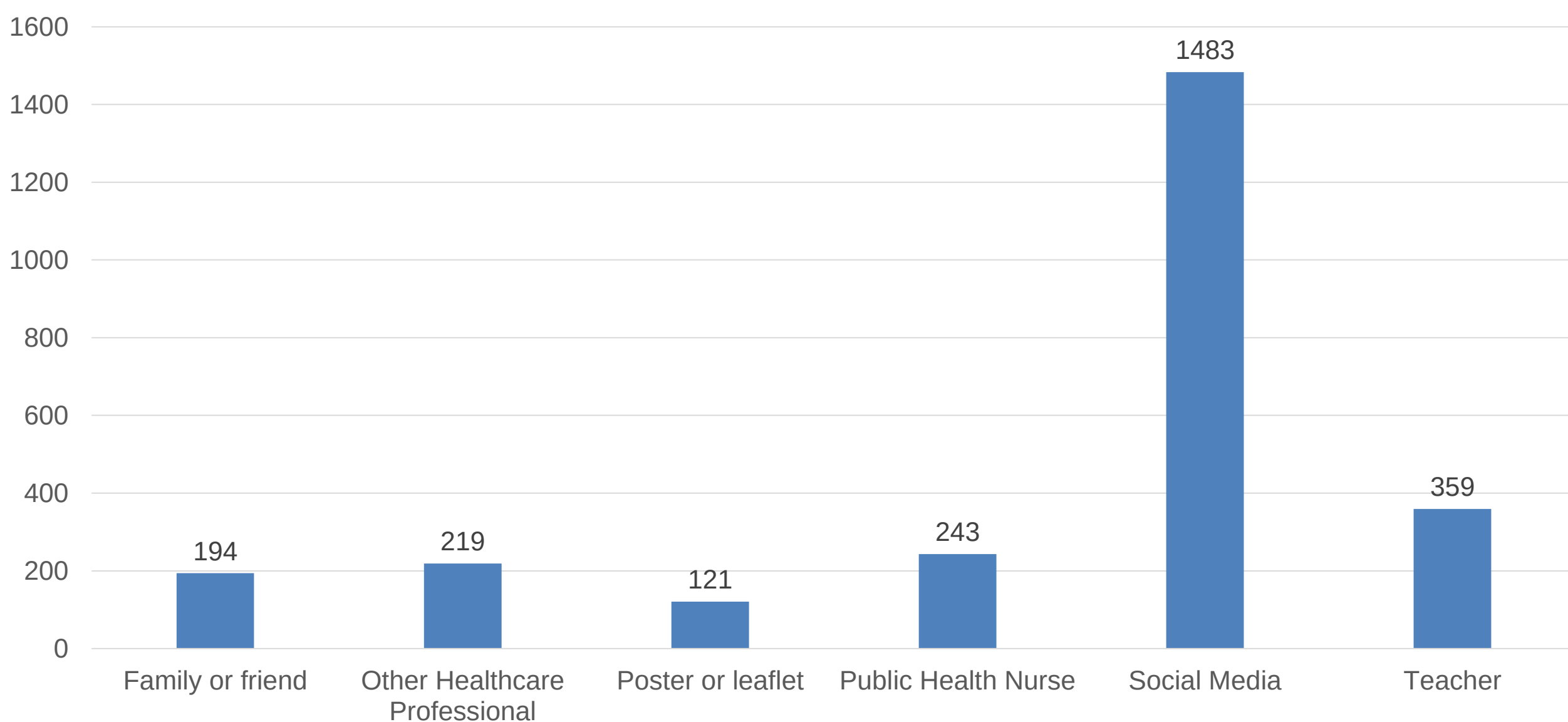


Figure 2: Source of information about the webinar for registrants.



Methods

- A video of two dietitians discussing the topic in an informal way was recorded. The webinar was called 'Take the Fuss out of Fussy Eating'.
- The content covered the following areas: introduction and definition of fussy eating: causes and development of fussy eating: identifying when to worry: handling mealtime challenges: encouraging acceptance of new foods: avoiding counterproductive techniques: challenges outside the home: nutritional concerns and supplements: managing parental stress and expectations: conclusion and resources.
- Thirteen webinars were held over the first year, at various times of day and evening. Webinars were held once monthly, with the exception of April 2024, when two webinars were held.
- Participants signed up to the webinar using the platform Eventbrite, and the webinar was delivered using the Zoom webinar platform.
- Automated reminder emails were sent two days before the webinar, two hours before the webinar and 10 minutes before the webinar.
- A health promotion and improvement officer opened each webinar session. They welcomed the audience and informed them about current health promotion offerings in the region before playing the pre-recorded main video content.
- The webinar did not include a facility for individual questions from viewers.

Results

- Webinar Registration and Attendance:**
- 3334 people registered to attend the webinar over the course of 12 months. Registration numbers for the webinar series steadily increased over the first year of implementation, from 23 for the first webinar in July 2023 to 480 in June 2024. Registration for the webinar increased dramatically after a 1 week paid advertisement on Facebook and Instagram in March (Figure 1).
 - Sixteen percent of those who registered identified that they were as either a "health care professional" or a "healthcare professional and a parent". The remaining 84% were parents.
 - A total of 963 people attended the webinar over the course of the 12 months. The average attendance rate each month (attendees as a percentage of signups) was 34% (range 12.8-56.9%) (Figure 1). Viewer retention (as measured by the number of viewers still online at the end of the webinar) averaged 95%.

- Participant Feedback:**
- 84% reported that they would recommend the webinar series to other parents or caregivers facing similar challenges with fussy eating. Most (70%) reported that they felt more reassured about fussy eating.
 - Seventy-three percent indicated that that they would change their parenting practises to manage fussy eating after watching the webinar.

Conclusion

This impactful yet lean digital solution to support parents with fussy eaters is the first of its kind in Ireland. Providing a live webinar encourages attendance and allows signposting to other relevant services. The methodology for this project is readily transferable to other areas of healthcare where first line information sharing is required.

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