



Tips for Picky Eaters

Ideas to raise healthy eaters

Are you concerned that your child is too picky, refusing vegetables or won't try new foods? Preschool years are characterized by bouts of asserting independence. What may appear as picky may just be attempts at assertiveness. However here are some tips to deal with these ups and downs

- **Stay calm**-if a child picks up that you are unhappy with his/her eating habits, it may become a battle. Threats, or even rewards only reinforce the power struggle.
- **Offer 1 new food at a time** and consider starting with a small portion. Try to serve a new food with a food your child already knows and likes.
- **What goes in may come out.** Young children are more likely to try a new food if they have the option of not swallowing it.
- **Try, try, try again**-most children need to be offered a food 10-15 times before they will accept it. Don't give up.
- **Be a role model**-imitation is a source of learning. If you want your children to be willing to try new foods, it's helpful for them to see you eating those foods also
- **Leave taste out of it**-talk about food's color, shape, texture- not whether it taste good.
- **Make it fun**-cut foods in different shapes, or present it in a fun way. Picky eaters may play with their food before they are willing to taste them.
- **Boycott the clean plate club.** Don't force a child to clean his plate. It may only ignite/reinforce a power struggle over food.
- **Don't be a short order cook** Be kid considerate, but constantly catering to food preferences can lead to picky eating
- **Limit fruit juice to 4-6 ounces/day and avoid excessive liquids** Juice intake can interfere with appetite for solid foods and continuously sipping on juice can be harmful to the teeth
- **Allow your child to serve himself** Encourage self-feeding to allow independence
- **Involve your child.** Allow your child to help with gardening, grocery shopping and planning and preparing meals.
- **Stick to a routine**-Serve meals and snacks around the same time daily. If the kitchen is closed at other times, a child may be more likely to eat at what's served during meals.
- **Keep meal time relaxed.** Avoid distractions at the table.

ENCOURAGE HEALTHY EATING HABITS

Allow your child to have a good appetite

Avoid “grazing” in between meals. Small children should have 3 meals and 3 snacks a day. Grazing (including breastfeeding) in between meals can keep your child from coming to the table with a good appetite.

Avoid Mealtime Battles.

Practice the division of responsibility of feeding.

As a parent, your job is to choose:

When meals and snacks will be served

What will be served

Your child’s job is to choose:

What to eat

How much to eat

You cannot force a child to eat. In fact, forcing a child to eat can cause more struggle at the table, and may result in poorer eating habits.

Eat together as a family

Role model healthy eating. Look for opportunities for your child to eat with other children. Have your child join you at the table, even if he or she is not eating. Twenty to thirty minutes is a reasonable amount of time to allow for eating.

Tastes change over time. If your child does not like a food you have introduced, take a break from it and re-introduce it later.

If you are considering the use of nutrition supplement drinks, please discuss with your child’s doctor or dietitian.

Consider tastes when introducing:

It’s not unusual for children to have taste preferences that limit the foods they are willing to eat. Using the flavor family method can help your child become more accepting of variety.

Sweet: Beets, carrots, garden peas, carrots, clementine, grapes, mango, peach

Mild: apricot, banana, pear, eggplant, chard, jicama, zucchini, potatoes

Earthy: beets, broccoli, brussels sprouts, kale

Grassy: celery, chard, cucumber, spinach

Spicy: arugula, chili peppers, onion, radish

Crisp/Fresh: pear, apples, grapes, honeydew

Tart: lemon, grapefruit, berries kiwi, pineapple

Consider textures when introducing:

It’s not unusual for children to have texture preferences that limit the foods they are willing to eat. Introducing textures slowly can help your child become more accepting of variety.

Soft: banana, avocado, peas, edamame

Soft Chewy: cauliflower, asparagus, eggplant, mushrooms, onions, tomatoes

Crisp/chewy: grapefruit, oranges, carrots, broccoli, fennel

Crispy/crunchy: apples, melon, asparagus, bell peppers, celery, turnips

Recommended Reading

Child of Mine: Feeding With Love and Good Sense by Ellyn Satter

How to Get Your Kid to Eat, But Not too Much by Ellyn Satter

Just Two More Bites by Linda Piette, RD

Raising a Healthy, Happy Eater: A Parent’s Handbook: A Stage-by-Stage Guide to Setting Your Child on the Path to Adventurous Eating