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Feeding Tips for Picky Eaters

Picky (choosy) eaters come in several varieties. Understanding why your child limits his/her food helps to match up the best way to deal with it. Is your child:

- A cautious child who needs slow introductions to new situations? If yes, chances are slow introductions to foods and new places to eat will help.
- Reacting to a previous bad experience with food (like pain from tooth problems or tummy troubles)? Be gentle, supportive, and reassuring.
- Resisting foods as part of a power struggle? The parent will never win this battle in the long run.

The following tips might be all you need to stop the cycle, but it can be hard. Talk to your child's dietitian or counselor on further ways to move beyond power struggles.

- Extra sensitive to tastes, smells, or textures? Help your child and you to understand more by asking questions and changing options, within reason. Speech pathologists and occupational therapists can help if your child refuses to eat certain textures.
- Quieter than you or his/her brothers/sisters? Their attempts to tell you when they are hungry or full may be easy to miss if your child's temperament is very different from yours.



Tips for Before Mealtime

- Children who do not like changes or need to think about changes need more time to warm up to the idea of eating. Give them 5 to 10 minute warnings before meals. Stop activities well before meal or snack time and ask them to help you prepare the food or set the table.
- Encourage your child to help plan meals and grocery shop. Respecting your child's opinion helps to reduce power struggles. Build a balance between nutritious foods and drinks, and those that are just for fun.
- Allow your child to choose between two options already approved by you. For example: "Do you want a grilled cheese or tuna sandwich for lunch today?"
- Let your child help cook dinner. Even a 3-year old can add chopped veggies to a salad or raisins to a muffin mix and stir the batter.

Tips for During Mealtime

- Serve the right foods at the right time in the right portions. Then, let your child decide how much to eat.
- Eat with your child. Be a role model by eating and enjoying the same foods you want your child to eat.
- Children who are easily distracted need a quiet place to eat. Move TV, radio, music (unless it is very soothing), pets, and toys out of range.
- Sometimes adding a little sugar to a vegetable or fruit helps your persnickety eater start eating that food. Reduce the added sweetness over time until you don't have to add any.
- Relaxed minds and stomachs enjoy food more. Keep the time just before, during, and just after meals and snacks positive. Schedule discipline and difficult conversations for later.
- Purchase fun plates, napkins, and glasses and colored twisty straws.
- Plan fun activities for after a meal, such as playing with a favorite toy or playing a game.
- Tell childhood stories about your favorite food and how your family prepared it. This can hold the child's attention for the whole meal.



- Break the rules. It's okay to eat lasagna for breakfast and scrambled eggs at dinner. Don't forget there are many ways to prepare potatoes, which can be served at all three meals of the day.
- Accept your child's quirks, within reason. For instance, some children will not eat foods that touch. You may need to use plates with separate areas or several small bowls.
- Buy small-sized foods or change the shape to make food more interesting. Kids are fascinated by small things, so try to add cherry tomatoes, baby carrots, and baby potatoes. Make 1-inch pancakes and serve them as finger foods with a small dish of syrup on the side.
- Change the way you serve food to make it more interesting. You could serve food on your child's doll dishes, or use your fanciest tablecloth.
- Serve smaller portions. Make asking for seconds and thirds easy.
- Give your child control – let him or her dip food in a sauce or eat it plain rather than have the sauce poured on the food.
- Make fruit ice drinks. Your child may be surprised at how appealing orange juice becomes when it is mixed in a blender with ice.
- Switch up sandwiches: Put sandwich toppings on mini-bagels, crackers, wheat bread, or tortilla shells.
- Include green peas, orange carrots, purple grapes, and white potatoes to make learning colors a part of mealtime.

Extra Tips

- Some children lose their appetite if they become **too** hungry. For very sensitive tummies, offer a bite or two of food while you cook to hold off aches from getting too hungry.
- Offer your child food within an hour of waking up.
- If your child is a nibbler, offer meals and snacks 3 or 4 hours apart, and no closer than 2 hours apart. If a picky eater nibbles more than every 2 hours, he or she might not feel hungry enough to eat a full meal.
- Sippers sip. Keep all drinks to meals and snack time, except for water, which is okay anytime.
- Remove food 30 minutes after serving it. Staring at food for a long time will take anybody's appetite away.
- Practice patience and then add more patience.
- Offer foods, but don't punish your child for not eating. Shame + blame = no gain.
- Offer a food at least 10 times over 5 or 6 months before taking a break for 6 months.