

Picky eaters

Children who are picky eaters tend to exhibit their personal desire to exert control. Their eating behaviors can be unpredictable and tend to fluctuate without any reason; at one moment they may eat without any struggle and instantly they may decide they are finished with the meal. Most children (without medical complications) are often able to eat according to their instincts about when and how much they need to eat to maintain their caloric needs. When a child's gross motor skills are beginning to develop, they are also beginning to demonstrate independence and strong preferences for specific foods and tastes; because of this, a child might be more interested in exploring a new environment than eating a new food.

Why are children picky? It is completely normal during a child's development to be reluctant to trying new foods. The average child takes 8-1 presentations of a new food before he or she is willing to accept it. It is important for parents to understand that a child tastes food differently than an adult does; children are more sensitive to strong flavors and usually prefer bland foods. The gastrointestinal tract of a child is not as mature as that of an adult and pickiness may also be an instinctive protective mechanism. The growth rate for a toddler is about one third to one half of what it was when they were an infant, so they may not need as much food to sustain development.

Is my picky eater getting adequate nutrition? Expect your child to go through phases; one week he may only want chocolate pudding at every meal, and the next week he may think it's the worst food ever. Don't force him to eat it; instead, just let him choose what he will eat. When introducing new foods, don't worry about how much your child will eat. Children under a year old are still getting the bulk of their nutrition from milk and formula. As your child becomes a toddler, the caloric requirement is, on average, 1,000 per day to sustain growth and nutrition. If your child refuses all fruits and vegetables and healthy proteins, encourage nibble trays with a variety of munchy foods. Here are some ways to "sneak" foods into their diet:

- Mix avocados, yogurt, banana bites and eggs into foods.
- Make yogurt smoothies and add tofu or fruit.
- Serve applesauce with meals to sneak in extra fruit.

Talk with your nutritionist for more extensive and child-specific ideas to boost your child's nutrition and caloric intake.

How do I cope with a picky eater? The best thing a parent can do is manage their mindset and expect the child to reject foods. Present the food in a non-threatening manner and allow the child to try the food when he or she is ready. Do not force a child to eat; this can lead to serious medical, developmental and relationship complications down the road. Most children can, and will, outgrow their pickiness.

- Offer new foods only when a child is hungry and rested.
- Present one new food at a time.
- Serve new food with favorite foods.
- Try new foods yourself – children are great observers!
- Develop new ways to present food – cut it into shapes, use dips, play games, ect.
- Limit snacks to two per day.
- Allow your child to help with the preparation.
- Plant a vegetable garden with your child.
- Design a menu with acceptable foods – parent and child must agree on the choices, each week add one new food to the menu and the child must choose it at least one time.
- Don't use dessert as a reward.
- Take your child to the grocery store to help you shop.
- Use fun names for foods they might like – 'peter rabbit sticks' for carrots.
- Have weekly picnics with other children – kids imitate and learn from other children best.

