

# Tips for Handling Picky Eaters

► Raising a picky eater is one of the most common food-related issues parents struggle to address. One day your child's favorite food in the world is spaghetti; the next, your child will not touch it. If this issue is not addressed, your child's nutrient intake may be limited.

If you have a fussy eater on your hands, here are some steps you can take to encourage your little one to become a happy healthy eater.

## Recognize that your child may or may not have an appetite.

Young children tend to eat only when they are hungry. If your child is not hungry, do not offer a meal or snack. Likewise, do not bribe or force your child to clean his or her plate. This may only start or reinforce a power struggle over food.

## Stick to a pattern.

Serve meals and snacks at about the same time every day. Do not serve juice, milk, and snacks for at least one hour before meals. If your child comes to the table hungry, he or she may be more motivated to eat.

## Be patient, especially with new foods.

Young children often touch or smell new foods and may even put small bits in their mouths and then take them out again. Your child may need to be introduced to new food several times before he or she takes the first bite. Encourage your child by talking about a food's color, shape, smell, and texture, not if it tastes good.



## Make meals and snack time fun.

Serve carrots and other vegetables with a favorite dip or sauce. Cut foods into different shapes with cookie cutters. Serve breakfast foods for dinner. Switch things up and ask for their ideas.

## Let your child help.

When shopping for groceries, ask your child to help you select fruits, vegetables, and other healthy foods. Don't buy anything that you wouldn't want your child to eat. At home, get your child involved in the preparation, cooking, and cleaning up process.

## Set a good example.

If you eat a variety of healthy foods, your child is more likely to follow your lead. Model the behavior you want to see from your child. If you do not like cauliflower but you want your child to try it, you must be willing to take a few bites of it yourself.

## Use your imagination.

Add chopped spinach or squash to spaghetti sauce, add fruit slices to cereal, or mix grated zucchini and carrots into casseroles and soups. This is a great way to get children to try healthy foods without their knowledge.

## Minimize distractions.

Turn off the television during meals, and don't allow books or toys at the table. This will encourage your child to focus on eating; television might enhance their desire for less nutritious foods.

## Don't offer dessert as a reward.

Holding back dessert if the meal is not eaten, sends the idea that dessert is the best food, which may only increase your child's desire for sweets. You might choose one or two nights a week as dessert nights, and skip dessert the rest of the week or redefine dessert as fruit, yogurt, or other healthy choices.

## Don't be a short-order cook.

Constantly preparing a meal for your child after he or she refuses the original meal may encourage your child's picky eating. Keep serving your children healthy choices until they become familiar and preferred.

If you are worried that picky eating is interfering with your child's growth and development or if certain foods make your child ill, consult your child's health care provider. Remember that your child's eating habits will not likely change overnight, but the small steps you take each day can help foster a lifetime of healthy eating.



Karen Elaine Softley, *Human Sciences Regional Extension Agent*, Human Nutrition, Diet, and Health, Auburn University

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