

# PICKY EATING GUIDE

It happens all of a sudden, your baby is a champ eater then, *snap!* picky eating begins. Foods they used to love may now be refused, and new foods are a fight. Meal times begin to feel a little more stressful. While this is a normal part of toddlerhood, it certainly can be frustrating! Read on for some tips that may help make meal time more enjoyable.



## What makes our kids picky eaters?

- Toddlers' growth rate slows down from when they were infants, and often so does their appetite.
- Becoming weary of new foods is believed to be an evolutionary benefit for young children in protecting them from eating potentially poisonous plants. In modern days, this can be a barrier to trying new and safe foods.
- Young children need and love snacks and drinks. However, these can crowd out meals – if poorly timed.
- Kids and people all interpret sensory stimuli differently. Kids with strong sensory responses may experience taste and smell more strongly, making them more sensitive to foods and thus perceived as “picky eaters.”

## LAY THE GROUNDWORK

*Having a relaxed attitude during mealtimes is key*

We might be cringing internally every time our little one refuses a food, but outwardly we want to play it cool. As if we don't care if the food is eaten or not. Too much pressure to eat may lead to more resistance and create a negative association with food. Part of our goal as parents is to begin building a healthy relationship with food right from the start.

- ✓ Aim to provide a balanced meal with produce, grains, and protein. Make sure there is at least one item on the tray you know your child will eat.
- ✓ Have your child come to the table hungry and ready to eat. This means avoiding snacks 1 to 1.5 hours before a meal.
- ✓ Be patient! It can take 10 (or more!) encounters with a new food before your child will eat it.
- ✓ Eat together. Family meals are a great way to role model healthy eating patterns and encourage an adventurous eater.



# DIVISION OF RESPONSIBILITY






**"Parents provide, children decide."**

As parents, our job is to provide a variety of foods as balanced meals and snacks. Our child's job is to decide what and how much (if any!) of the food to eat. It can be challenging to watch your child refuse foods, but part of our job is to trust our child to eat the amount he or she needs.



## Feed the Senses

Eating involves all the senses, not just taste. Here are some steps to try with your little one to gradually work toward eating a new food:

-  **Touch the food with a fork**
-  **Touch/Feel with hands**
-  **Smell it**
-  **Kiss it (Bring to lips)**
-  **Lick it (Touch with tongue)**
-  **Put food in mouth & take it right out again**

The goal is by the time you reach step 6, which could take weeks or longer, your child will be very comfortable with the food and ready to take a first bite – even if it's just a small one. Once she takes this first bite of a new food, try to keep the food in rotation often so it stays familiar.

## GET KIDS IN THE KITCHEN

Children as young as 18 months can start helping out in the kitchen. Give them big spoons to mix with, lettuce leaves to tear up, herbs and spices to add, or sauce to spread (helping your child as needed!). This type of exposure to food – without the pressure to eat – is a great way for kids to become more familiar with the food, perhaps even leading them to taste the food at meal time.

## MIX IT UP

**Offer the same (new/disliked) food prepared different ways.**

For example, you can offer carrots with peas, carrot spears, carrot coins, or softer steamed carrots. The food could also be offered with a dip, such as hummus. Kids enjoy flavor, just like adults! Adding herbs, spices, and fats can really enhance the taste of foods that he or she may not like.

# PICKY EATING VERSUS PROBLEM EATING

While picky eating is fairly common, sometimes it is confused with lesser common issues such as difficulty tolerating certain textures, very small variety of foods eaten, and refusing entire food categories. If you suspect you have a problem eater, speak with your pediatrician as a referral to a specialist may be needed.



**QUESTIONS  
ABOUT  
PICKY  
EATING?**

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