

Healthy Habits Start Early: Tips for Feeding Picky Eaters

Eating a variety of healthy foods is important for your child's health. But it's not always easy to get kids to try new and different foods — and sometimes, it can be downright frustrating.

The good news is there's a lot you can do to help your child get comfortable exploring a variety of foods. And you both may end up having some fun while you're at it!



Take steps to prevent picky eating.

Offer a variety of foods right from the start. Before 9 months, babies' taste buds are still immature, so they are open to lots of foods. Take advantage of this and offer your baby different flavors and textures when he's ready for solids.

Provide balanced meals. Babies need balanced meals, just like the rest of us. Offer veggies and meat in addition to fruits.



Use these strategies if your child is a picky eater.

Try these tips with your toddler:

- **Wait until she is hungry** to give her foods she hasn't wanted in the past — she may be more adventurous.
- **Let her feed herself when possible.** This helps her feel in control of what she's eating.
- **Give her a choice between 2 healthy options.** She may be more likely to try something new when she can choose it.
- **Offer at least 1 healthy food you know she likes at each meal.** It's normal for kids to go through phases when it comes to food. If she will only eat her current favorite, it's okay.



When your picky eater is preschool-aged, you can also:

- **Let him choose a healthy new food at the grocery store.** He'll be more likely to try it if he picked it out.
- **Have him help with meal prep.** Get him interested in meals by having him help prepare a new food to try.
- **Talk about where food comes from.** If possible, try planting herbs or vegetables — it's a great way to get him interested!

Stay strong — don't give in to tantrums or whining.

If your child refuses to eat, you're not alone. So many parents have been there!

- **Try to stay calm.** The best reaction is no reaction at all.
- **Don't talk about what she is or isn't eating.** Talk about your family's day instead.
- **Never use food as a reward or punishment.** Pressuring your child may make her even less likely to eat.
- **Don't feel pressured to make a second meal.** Tell her that this is the meal you've made for the family. If she doesn't want to eat it, save it for the next meal.

Young children have considerably varied appetites. **Trust that if your child is truly hungry, she'll eat.**

Remember, when it comes to encouraging your child to eat a variety of foods: **you provide, your child decides.**



What about restaurant tantrums?

We know, that's the worst — but you've got this. Calmly take your child to the restroom or the car and wait there with him until he quiets down. If he doesn't, stay strong — even if it means you need to leave the restaurant.



Still have questions? Your child's doctor is your partner in raising a healthy child.

For more information about age-appropriate foods, visit www.healthychildren.org/growinghealthy.

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