



Help!
My Child is a Picky Eater

Tips to Help Your Child Become a Healthy Eater

Picky eating is common in toddlers and preschoolers. The good news is picky eating is normal and should go away with time. Continue to be a great parent who provides healthy foods and be patient.

For a while my child only wanted peanut butter sandwiches, and now she only wants to eat hot dogs and drink apple juice.

- This is called a “food jag.” Relax. This will not last forever.
- Offer healthy foods at mealtime, and make sure at least one of the foods is something your child likes. This could be any healthy food, but not sweet foods like candy or dessert.
- Set a good example by eating a variety of healthy foods yourself. Your child will eventually begin to try more foods.
- Try not to give your child foods other than what you have offered at mealtime. If you cook a special meal just for him, it may encourage picky eating. If he refuses to eat the meal you serve, do not worry, just let him wait for the next snack time. He might be hungry, but he will not starve.
- If your child eats very few foods, talk to your doctor about giving a one-a-day multi-vitamin/mineral with iron supplement made for children.

Making Peace with Food

Remember, there are many ways you can cope with picky eaters and help them try new foods.

Be a good role model.
Eat and serve nutritious foods for your family and your child will follow your lead.

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What should I do when my child will not eat?

Do not make it a big deal and try not to worry. Most children get the nutrients they need over the course of a week. Continue to provide healthy foods and offer new foods with foods your child likes. You should decide what foods are offered and when your child eats. Let your child decide how much to eat, even if he decides to eat very little or not at all.





My child won't eat vegetables.

- Continue to offer vegetables along with foods your child likes. It may take 15-20 tries before your child will accept a new food. Children learn by watching you, so eat vegetables in front of them and talk about how good they taste.
- Do not force your child to eat his vegetables. If you do, he may end up disliking vegetables.
- Fruits have many of the same nutrients as vegetables. Your child may prefer eating fruits.
- Kids love to dip! Serve broccoli, carrots, and other vegetables with low-fat dips or sauces, like yogurt, melted cheese, or avocado. Add vegetables to dishes like spaghetti, casseroles, and soups.
- Try making smoothies or vegetable juices with your child.
- Add fruits to breads, cereal, yogurt, or salads.



My child is not very hungry at mealtime, but he wants to eat snacks all day.

- Regular, sit-down meal and snack times are important. Children need some snacks because their stomachs are small and can't hold very much food at one time. But, if your child doesn't eat at mealtime, don't allow him to eat until the next scheduled snack time.
- Offer only healthy foods at snack time. Avoid snacks like candy, soda, and chips.
- Try to offer only water between meals. Other drinks like milk or juice may fill up your child's tummy and keep your child from being hungry for food at meal and snack times.



My child doesn't like meat. Doesn't he need the protein?

- Protein foods are important, but many foods besides meat contain protein. These foods have as much protein as a child-size serving of meat:
 - 1 cup of milk
 - Small bowl of cooked, dry beans
 - Peanut butter sandwich (choking hazard for children younger than 2 years old)
 - 1 egg
 - 1 cup of yogurt
- Some children prefer ground or stewed meat or meat softened with gravy or sauce.



Before my baby turned 2, she ate really well. Now I am worried because some days she doesn't eat very much at all.

- During their first year, babies grow faster than at any other time in life. After the first year, growth starts to slow down and so does the amount your child will eat. Parents often become worried when their good eater becomes a picky eater.
- This slow down is to be expected. If you have concerns that your child is not gaining enough weight, ask your dietitian or doctor to be sure.
- Don't allow your child to drink more than 16 ounces of milk and 6 ounces of juice in one day, even though you think he has not eaten enough.

Get your child excited about trying new foods.

- **Make it a game.** Play a game of food taste testing when your child has friends over.
- When shopping, **let your child choose** a new fruit or vegetable.
- **Let your child help you prepare meals or snacks.** Children are more likely to try foods they have helped to prepare.
- **Make it fun!** Cut foods into shapes with cookie cutters. Make faces out of food. Name a food dish after your child. Every now and then, make breakfast foods for dinner.



Additional tips for feeding your child

- Sit down and eat meals with your child. Children usually eat better when not eating alone.
- Mealtimes can be frustrating, especially when your child won't eat. Try to keep mealtimes pleasant. Your child will eat better in happy surroundings.
- Give your child some control over what he wants to eat. Forcing a child to eat foods he dislikes will probably make the problem worse and can lead to power struggles.
- Offer one new food at a time and serve it with something you know your child likes. Try offering new foods at the start of a meal when your child is most hungry. It is normal for young children to prefer familiar foods and reject new foods.
- Serve your child small portions of food. Allow your child to ask for seconds if he is still hungry. Your child may eat very small amounts on some days and larger amounts on others.
- Do not restrict the amount of food your child eats. Your child may become afraid of going hungry and overeat when he gets a chance.
- Try not to give food as a reward. Rewarding with sweets may cause your child to prefer those foods.
- Do not let your child get into to the refrigerator to pick out foods and drinks.
- Do not give milk when your child does not eat. Your child may fill up on milk and not be hungry for other foods.