

Picky Eaters

- ✓ Picky eating is normal! Most children go through a stage where they refuse to eat certain foods.
- ✓ Food preferences have a lot to do with genes (though not entirely).
- ✓ Children's taste buds are much more sensitive than adults—their food dislikes may seem strange to us but may be very strong for them.



Don't stress...



- If your child is growing normally and is not lacking in energy, he or she is most likely getting the nutrients he or she needs for healthy development, even if he or she is picky. You can always check with your pediatrician if you have concerns.
- Too much stress at meal time doesn't help anyone out, least of all you!



...but still encourage them

- You can still have an impact on how your children think about food.
- It's important to help them form good habits and learn to make good choices, even if it doesn't always result in them eating what you want right now.
- Children can learn that it is expected of them to behave a certain way at the table and that they are expected to eat certain foods, even if it's a future goal.
- One day your child is likely to grow out of it, and you want him or her to have the opportunity to make a good choice, rather than thinking of himself or herself as a picky eater forever.



Picky Eating: Strategies

Involve your children in preparing meals. Even a simple step like helping to wash produce or set the table can help.



Be a good role model! They will be more likely to try something if they see you eating it and enjoying it.



Try setting a rule that they have to have a little bit of vegetable (or whichever food is a problem) on their plate at each meal. Tell them that they don't necessarily have to try it, but it has to go on the plate.



Try using fun names for food, or having your children make edible fruit and vegetable art.

If your child says she's hungry, but then only wants dessert or other treats, have a conversation with her about whether they're *really* hungry or not.



Try serving vegetables or problem foods *first*, before other foods appear on the table. If it's not competing with a more familiar food, a child will be more likely to try it.

Reducing Your Stress

It's late, you're tired, you have to cook dinner...and your child is refusing to eat. It's hard not to get upset or stressed when your child is digging in his or her heels about food. But remember, getting stressed about mealtimes and picky eating isn't going to help anyone out, least of all you! Here are a couple things to keep in mind to help you.

Plan your meals ahead of time as much as you can. Then you will not be strapped for time with shopping and planning.



Your child is in a stage where he or she is figuring out limits, and knows how to push your buttons! If you find yourself getting in a tug-of-war over food, remember to take a deep breath and stay calm. Remember that you are the parent and you set the limits, not your child.

Keep in mind that children may be resistant to eating when they're not hungry. If your child is being really picky at lunch or dinner, take a look at how often he or she is eating. Spacing out meals more or serving less for snack can help make a child ready to eat main meals.



Some things to avoid:

Using sweets as a reward for eating a vegetable. While this may work in the short term, it ultimately makes your child less likely to develop a liking for vegetables. It also makes the sweets even more desirable—so brownies become more appealing than before!

“Hiding” vegetables in comfort foods. It’s great to incorporate chopped or pureed veggies into pasta, soup, or meatloaf, but it’s important your children know what they’re eating. Otherwise, they are not going to learn to *choose* to eat vegetables. And anyway, most recipes that “hide” vegetable purees in comfort foods are not adding very much to the nutrient content of the food.

Remember that you’re not a short-order cook! Make the same meal for adults and children—that way, children will not get the message that they can always eat whatever they want.