

# Tips for Parents of Picky Eaters

## For You

- Keep mealtime positive.
- Ignore negative behavior whenever possible.
- Never bribe or reward your child to eat, and never use food as a bribe, reward, or punishment (especially dessert); keep food neutral.
- Never punish your child for not eating.
- Give children two reasonable food choices as time, convenience, and situation allow.
- Never be a short-order cook; let your kids help plan the menus and stick to this nonnegotiable menu. Serve one meal for the whole family; modify it (size of foods, texture, or portion size) for your toddler or preschooler.
- Avoid a power struggle and never battle over food. If your child refuses to eat (doesn't like the food, is not hungry, or not feeling well), never force him/her to eat or punish him/her for not eating.
- Help your child develop a healthy body image by modeling good eating habits. Set a good example by eating a variety of healthful foods every day. Be a great role model for eating and downplay dieting, calorie counting, and food phobias.
- Keep calm about spills and messes.
- Be sure to take time to serve and eat breakfast with your kids.
- Stop obsessing over food jags. Kids tend to get what they need over a week's worth of meals.
- Check your own attitude about food. Make sure you are not transferring a dieting obsession or your pickiness about food to your child.
- Be assured that your child is developing normally by tracking your child's steady growth on his pediatric health care provider's growth chart.

- When your child refuses a food, substitute another food within the same food group and relax.
- Avoid succumbing to food games and whims. No dinner theater and do not let your child manipulate you into over indulgences, like, "Just one more \_\_\_\_\_."
- Plan an interesting after-dinner activity if your child dawdles over the meal.
- Stay calm and avoid overreacting to your picky eater. Your child senses your stress. Remember, it's what and how much your child eats over a week, not at each meal, that counts.
- Refrain from taking pickiness personally.

## For Your Child

- Have a quiet time before meals to let kids calm themselves, and they will eat better.
- Turn off the television during mealtime to cut down on distractions and make the most of conversation.
- Schedule meals so kids can eat every 3 to 4 hours. This helps body clocks regulate and also helps children learn what it feels like to be hungry and full.
- Expect kids to leave food on their plates; never require kids to clean their plates.
- Allow your young child to experiment with taste and textures by feeling his/her food and enjoying the sensory experiences.
- Eat together as a family, so children see others enjoying their food and healthful eating patterns.
- Let children self-regulate by deciding how much they eat and when they've had enough.
- Take your child out of the high chair or excuse him/her from the table when he/she has clearly lost interest in eating.
- Let kids help in food preparation — shopping, cooking, and serving food. Start by giving them simple jobs and get them cooking.
- Let older kids serve themselves from family-style serving dishes.



## For the Food

- Serve simple foods, so kids can try one flavor at a time.
- Stimulate interest by varying shapes, sizes, and textures.
- Offer a balanced, wide variety of nutritious foods. Continue to offer different fruits and vegetables. If not forced to eat them, kids will often try them over time.
- Serve child-sized portions. It's better to serve less and have your child ask for more, than to overwhelm him/her with too much food on his/her plate.
- Introduce new foods in tiny portions.
- Serve a familiar, happy food or two along with a new food.
- Serve your child nutritious snacks two or three times a day (just not right before a meal), and make them count as *healthful* munchies.
- Make meals appetizing with lots of eye appeal.
- Remember, a food must be served at least 10 times before a picky eater will eat that food in an acceptable portion.
- Allow treats as one of life's simple pleasures. Just balance these times with wise food choices and physical activity.