



Handy Handouts®

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Picky Eaters

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Like adults, children have different preferences when it comes to food. Temperatures, colors, and textures may influence whether a child will try and/or like a new food. Some children are “picky” eaters, and prefer certain types or textures of food and refuse many others. However, a child’s refusal to eat certain foods is not considered “picky” if lack of nutrition affects growth and development.



Strategies to Help Picky Eaters

Keep the Options Open – It can take ten to fifteen attempts before a child will accept a new food! The goal is to keep presenting new options while making the options easier to eat. For example, roasting vegetables may make them taste sweeter or adding a squirt of lemon to cooked broccoli may make it tastier. Some children may refuse to eat cauliflower in head form, but will devour cauliflower rice! Presenting several different options may help turn a refusal into a try.

Planned Plating – The order of presentation and the amount of food given can affect if and how much food a child will eat at mealtime. Try presenting things children are less excited about eating (i.e., veggies) at the beginning of the meal when they are most hungry, followed by food favorites (i.e., chicken nuggets) near the end of the meal. A good rule of thumb for determining serving size is one tablespoon per year of age. For example, two tablespoons of corn is appropriate for a two year old. When portioned correctly, it can appear much more manageable to eat most of the food on the plate.

Timing is Everything – If you know your child is cranky and struggles after a certain time each night, try to have dinner before that happens. Kids who aren’t fighting sleep are more likely to sit long enough to try new foods!

Imagination Food Station – Some kids may be unimpressed with a particular food or dinner combination. Combining certain foods to create something new such as “ants on a log” (i.e., raisins and peanut butter on a celery stick) or inventing new names for familiar staples such as calling broccoli “green alien trees” can be enough fun to shake up the dinnertime routine.

One Bite Rule – the one bite rule is a great option if a child is refusing to try something new or refuses a food they have eaten in the past. The goal of this rule is not to get a child to eat all of the new food today, but to help them learn to like it over time; therefore, it is important that caregivers hold up their end of the deal and move on after one bite.

If you're worried your child is more than a "picky eater," ask your pediatrician for a referral to a Speech-Language Pathologist (SLP) or feeding specialist. An SLP or professional with experience working with feeding and swallowing will be able to determine if your child is going through a typical toddler phase or recommend further evaluation and intervention.

References:

Barr, Sabrina, "Children May be Picky Eaters Due to Genetics, Claims Study," December 15, 2017, <http://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/health-and-families/children-picky-eaters-genetics-parents-fussy-study-food-university-illinois-usa-a8112131.html>.

Micco, Nicci, "How to Handle Picky Eaters," Parenting. Retrieved 12/27/2017 from <http://www.parenting.com/article/picky-eater-kids>

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