

Tips to Overcome Picky Eating

APPETITE

- Offer healthy snacks, but avoid “grazing” all day. Your child will eat less at meals if they are full from snacks.
- Do not tell your child how much to eat from their plate. Let them listen to their hunger cues. Like adults, children have some days where they feel hungrier than other days.
- Serve smaller portions so your child is not overwhelmed by the amount of food on the plate.
- Have foods from 3-4 food groups at meals and 1 -2 food groups at snacks.
- Serve only water between meals.

TASTE

- Serve new foods with your child’s favorite foods.
- Mix grated or chopped vegetables into casseroles or soups.
- Use dips or sauces to encourage your child to taste new foods.
- Your child might say “no” or complain about new foods or some known foods. Keep serving new foods every now and then.
- Don’t give up! Continue offering many different foods.

TEXTURE

- Let your child feel food with their hands/fingers, even if meal time gets messy.
- It is ok if kids put new foods in their mouths & spit it out if they do not like it.
- Talk about the way new foods look or feel (hard, smooth, bumpy, soft, etc).
- Try using cookie cutters to make food more fun.

BEHAVIOR

- Make food fun! Have your child help cook meals.
- Name recipes you make together: “John’s Magical Soup.” This helps kids get excited about tasting new foods.
- Let your child pick out vegetables/fruits from the grocery store or farmers market.
- Avoid being a short-order cook. Offer choices such as “Would you like carrots or broccoli?”
- Serve everyone the same meal (as appropriate).
- Avoid food fights or arguing about food. Ignore negative eating behaviors.
- Give verbal praise for positive eating behaviors.
- Be a good role model and try new foods yourself.
- Avoid food rewards. Offer play time outside with the family or a fun activity like bowling instead.

ENVIRONMENT

- Keep meals no longer than 20 – 30 minutes.
- Make sure your child has a comfortable place to eat with family (high chair, booster chair, etc.)
- Have a routine and serve meals/snacks around the same time daily.
- Do not have distractions such as TV, phones, tablets or toys at meals. Instead, enjoy family time and conversations.

Picky eating behaviors are common for children 2-5 years of age.

If your child is growing as your doctor advises, they are likely eating enough.

If you are worried, reach out to your pediatrician and dietitian.

