

# Picky Eaters

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Some children learn to be fussy about food while others are naturally more sensitive to taste, smell and texture. Creating a healthy eating environment and providing a variety of foods will help you cope with a child who is a picky eater.

## How to create a healthy eating environment

### *Set a Meal and Snack Schedule*

Set a schedule for breakfast, mid-morning snack, lunch and afternoon snack. This will help your child understand that there is a meal coming every two to three hours and that they will not go hungry. If a picky eater chooses to skip a meal or a snack, he or she can wait until the next scheduled time in a couple of hours. A child who chooses not to eat can still join the family for conversation.

### *Family Style Meals*

Children like to eat with other people. Sit down and eat with your child in a relaxed and enjoyable way. Keep the conversation to pleasant topics including how we enjoy the food we eat.

### *Share Responsibility*

You control what, where and when food is provided and let the child decide how much and whether or not to eat the food. Children are born with the ability to regulate their food intake. Sometimes, a child may eat very little or not eat anything at all, but will make up the nutrition later that day or later in the week. Do not offer food to comfort a child as it teaches the child that eating is a way to feel better and may contribute to overweight.

### *Don't Battle over Food*

Children are more likely to try new foods if the mood is happy and free of power struggles. Battles over food can lead to resistance and defiance from the child. Respect individual preferences and don't bribe, play games or force a child to eat. Children need to learn to manage their own eating and preserve their ability to know when they are hungry and when they are full.

## Provide a variety of foods

It is easy to get into a rut of serving only foods that you know a child will eat. However, offering a variety of foods, including food with sources of protein, fiber, calcium, iron, and folate, will help ensure that children are getting enough nutrients.

### *Tips for getting more variety in a child's diet*

- Serve familiar foods along with new foods.
- Serve smaller portions of new foods.
- Include children in food preparation.
- Cut foods in interesting and fun shapes.
- Limit milk intake to 16-24 ounces a day. When children drink too much milk they often don't get enough nutrition from other foods.
- Set a good example. Show children that you like nutritious foods.
- Don't give up! A child may need to experience a new food 10 times before he will try it.

## References and Resources

Ellyn Satter's Division of Responsibility in Feeding, <https://www.ellynsatterinstitute.org/how-to-feed/the-division-of-responsibility-in-feeding/>

Kidshealth, Nutrition and Fitness, "How Should I Deal With A Picky Eater?", <https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/picky-eater.html>



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