

Picky Eating: Feeding Your Child New Foods

Is your child eating plain noodles for dinner again? It is common for young children to eat only a few foods and resist trying anything new, much to the frustration of their parents who are trying to get them to eat their vegetables and join in family dinner. There are a few tips and tricks to help your child learn to try new foods and increase their nutritional intake.

First though, what is picky eating?

Picky eating is defined as a restricted food intake due to an unwillingness to try new foods. Picky eaters have a strong preference for certain types of foods based on texture, flavour or even colour and a strong aversion to anything that looks, smells or tastes different. While it is normal for children to express a preference for certain foods, picky eating becomes a problem if children do not have enough variety in their diet. It can lead to digestive issues, problems with their weight and is disruptive to your routine as a family.

A good rule to follow is this:

**The parent decides what and when the child eats,
the child decides if and how much.**

This allows the parent to offer a variety of healthy choices within their schedule of meals and snacks, and it allows the child to have choice about if they are going to try something new or not.

Encouraging your child to try new foods can feel frustrating. Be patient and consistent and you will see improvements if you use these strategies.



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Tips to Improve Picky Eating:

- Set consistent meal and snack times and stick with time limits. Allow your child 30 minutes for each meal and 15 minutes for a snack.
- Offer food in the same place each time (ie. at the table) and limit distractions during meal/snack time by keeping the television and phone off so they can focus on the full sensory experience of food.
- At each meal or snack, offer a variety of foods, in small portions, with a balance of a protein (meat, nuts, eggs) starch (rice, potatoes, pasta, bread) and fruit and vegetables.
- Offer water, or a small amount of milk to drink with their meal so they are not filling up on liquids instead of solid food.
- Involve your child in the food discovery process by bringing them grocery shopping and talk about the variety of foods you see there.
- Involve them in food preparation, your child will love spending time with you in the kitchen.
- Eat together and role model trying new foods.
- Consider your child's preferences and get creative about how to modify new foods to appeal to them. For example, if they like soft foods like mashed potatoes, try introducing mashed carrots.
- Try separating foods on a divider plate if they do not like flavours and textures to be mixed.
- Keep servings really small so they are not overwhelmed with new choices.
- Introduce new foods alongside favourite foods when they are especially hungry.
- Give your child adequate time to eat, and share the experience with them.
- Don't worry about mess or manners when trying new foods.
- Don't withhold treats, rather focus on rewarding attempts at trying new foods.
- Explain to your child the many ways you can experience new foods; you can smell it, lick it, touch it to your lips, chew it, swallow it.
- It can take several exposures to new foods before that food may be accepted. Maybe you need to start by simply setting the new food on the table where they can see it, then next time move it closer to them, then next time put some on their plate, then encourage them to smell it etc.

Remember, be patient and consistent!

