

How to Deal with Picky Eaters

1. Respect your child's appetite — or lack of one

If your child isn't hungry, **don't force a meal or snack**. Likewise, **don't bribe or force your child to eat certain foods or clean his or her plate**.

Serve small portions to avoid overwhelming your child and **give him or her the opportunity to independently ask for more**.

2. Stick to the routine

Serve meals and snacks at about the same times every day. Allowing your child to fill up on juice, milk or snacks throughout the day might decrease his or her appetite for meals.

3. Be patient with new foods

Young children often touch or smell new foods, and might even put tiny bits in their mouths and then take them back out again. **Your child might need repeated exposure**, up to 15 times, **before he or she takes the first bite**.

Encourage your child by talking about a food's color, shape, aroma and texture — not whether it tastes good. **Serve new foods along with your child's favorite foods**.

4. Make it fun

Serve **broccoli and other veggies with a favorite dip or sauce**. **Cut foods into various shapes** with cookie cutters. **Offer breakfast foods for dinner**.

If a child is **served a variety**, they are likely to **eat more**. Also, serve a **variety of brightly colored foods**.

Rename foods to make them more appealing, serve them “**x-ray vision carrots**” or “**power peas**,” instead of carrots or peas.

Place favorite character stickers on snack bags of fruit or vegetables and research shows that **they will eat twice as much**.

5. Recruit your child's help

At the grocery store, **ask your child to help you select fruits, vegetables and other healthy foods**. Don't buy anything that you don't want your child to eat. At home, **encourage your child to help you rinse veggies, stir batter or set the table**.

6. Set a good example

If you eat a variety of healthy foods, your child is more likely to follow suit.

7. Be creative

Add chopped broccoli or green peppers to spaghetti sauce, top cereal with fruit slices, or mix grated zucchini and carrots into casseroles and soups.

8. Minimize distractions

Turn off all electronics/gadgets during meals. This will help your child focus on eating. Keep in mind that **television advertising might also encourage your child to desire sugary or less nutritious foods.**

9. Don't offer dessert as a reward

Withholding dessert sends the message that dessert is the best food, which might **only increase your child's desire for sweets**. You might select one or two nights a week as dessert nights, and skip dessert the rest of the week — or **redefine dessert as fruit, yogurt or other healthy choices.**

10. Don't be a short-order cook

Preparing a separate meal for your child after he or she rejects the original meal **might promote picky eating**. **Encourage your child to stay at the table for the designated mealtime** — even if he or she doesn't eat. **Keep serving your child healthy choices until they become familiar and preferred.**

In the meantime, remember that **your child's eating habits won't likely change overnight** — but the **small steps you take each day can help promote a lifetime of healthy eating.**

Resources:

<http://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/childrens-health/in-depth/childrens-health/art-20044948?pg=1>

<http://smarterlunchrooms.org/>