Mealtime with a Picky Eater

What is picky eating?
Many parents know what a picky eater looks like. Some children may refuse to eat all but a small number of foods. Some may refuse a specific kind of food, such as fruits, vegetables, or meat. And some may stop trying new foods.

Picky eating is common
Almost all children will go through stages where they refuse to eat some, or even most, of their meals. But for most children, being picky isn’t harmful. Remember that children are learning to eat. Taste, hunger, and mood can change.

Sometimes children aren’t hungry. Or they may be less interested in foods that aren’t their favorites.

When is picky eating a problem?
For most children, picky eating is something that should not last long. If it leads to weight change or upsets meals, talk to your child’s provider.

Tips for feeding your picky eater
Start small with new food goals.
• Try a different brand of a favorite food. Praise your child for trying even the smallest bites.
• Pair a familiar taste with the new taste. If your child likes strawberries, try dipping them in a new yogurt!

Mealtime beverage
• Wait to offer beverages until the end of the meal.

Try new foods when kids are hungry.
• Try new foods first. Offer them at the start of a meal or snack.
• Trying new foods at mealtimes can be stressful. It may be easier to try new foods at snack time.

Model trying new foods.
• Sit down and eat new foods with your child.
• Children may be nervous or scared to try a new food. Seeing you eat the food shows them the food is safe.
• Remind other family members to support the child. If a sibling is always poking fun, it can be hard for your child to make progress.

Try new foods again and again.
• Children may need to try foods more than 20 times before they accept the food.
• Ask questions like...

What do you smell?
• Don’t worry if your child spits out a food. The child may be learning about a new texture or taste.
• Place new foods on the table. Placing new foods on the table and seeing others eat it introduces a child to food.

http://ohioaap.org/projects/PMP
Make trying new foods part of your typical daily routine.
• Set a goal to try a bite of what the family is having at every meal and snack. Your child will be more open to eating new foods when it is a normal part of their day.

Try this!
Try “eating around the plate.” Take a single bite of each food on the plate before repeating a food.

Remember when you first start to try new food, your child may get upset.
• This might include crying, screaming, or gagging.
• Teach polite tasting. Show the child how to spit out food in a napkin.
• Your child may demand sweet treats and snacks instead of other foods you are offering. Continue to serve planned healthy foods and offer first when they are most hungry.
• Your child may try to sneak unhealthy snacks. Try removing those foods from your home for a while.
• Talk to your child’s provider if you have questions.

Remember, children are learning to eat, just like they are learning many other skills.

Be patient. It will get better!

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