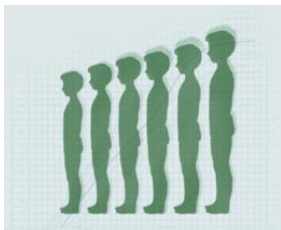


Picky Eaters

Are your children picky eaters? Do they refuse to eat the healthy foods that you serve? Are you fed up with fighting over food each night at the dinner table? If your child is going through a picky eating phase, chances are you've tried many times and different ways to get them to eat more healthy foods. However, young children become picky eaters for a variety of reasons. Your best bet is to first try and understand why they aren't eating. In many cases, this behavior may have nothing to do with food, but rather control. Below are some helpful facts and pointers to help you with your picky eater.



SLOWER GROWTH:

Keep in mind that early childhood is a period in development when growth has slowed and calorie needs are not as

high as during a growth spurt. Between the ages of 2-5 years old, children only gain an average of four to five pounds per year. This means they'll need less overall calories to maintain their steady growth, and as a result will be less hungry. So try to aim for a nutritionally-balanced week.



GET THEM INVOLVED:

Children may be more willing to try new foods if you involve them in the decision-making process.

Go to the grocery store or farmer's market **together** and allow them to help pick out fruits and vegetables for the week. At home let them to help you make meals using both the foods they selected as well as a variety of other foods you'll be serving. Avoid preparing more than one meal at dinner time. You want to avoid becoming a short order cook. This sends the message to the child that they only have to eat foods they like and discourages them from trying new things.



KEEP TRYING:

Studies have shown that children sometimes need to be exposed to a food 15 times or

more before they'll consider trying it, so don't give up hope. Continue to serve wholesome fruits and vegetables at each meal. Chances are they'll eventually want to try those healthier new foods, **ESPECIALLY** if they've seen you eating them, and more importantly, if they've seen you **ENJOYING**

SMALLER TUMMIES NEED LESS FOOD:



A child's tummy is about the size of their fist, which is significantly smaller than an adult stomach.

Therefore small, frequent meals are a better way to feed a child. Try to prevent snacking at least 1-2 hours before meal times so kids come to the table hungry for their meal. Often times when a child is refusing food, it isn't because they are picky eaters, they may just feel too full from the previous meal or snack. Remember the same rule goes for beverages – keep them out of sight to avoid ruining the appetite!



INDEPENDENCE ISSUES:

Right around age two, children start to show signs of increased independence. During this time, the dining room table can become a battleground

for you and your child. An important way that children learn to be independent is through establishing rules around their eating behavior. **Remember:** Your child will decide how much to eat, but you as the parent will decide what foods are offered and when, so make sure to include as many healthy options as you can. Children are better able to control their own food intake when parents are less controlling about it.



KEEP A SCHEDULE: Meals and snacks are important for growing children to meet their nutrition needs, so try as best you can to get children on a schedule for eating 3 meals per day plus 2 small

snacks between meals. Having a set schedule of breakfast, lunch and dinner with small snacks between meals helps your child to know that there is a meal coming every 2-3 hours and that they will not go hungry. Children tend to respond well to routines, so try to serve meals and snacks at the same time every day. In the same way that you have a set bed time routine, you can also set an eating routine that promotes healthy eating.



FOOD JAGS: A food jag is when a child eats only one food all of the time, such as peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. It's OK to give into this request for a few days. Chances are they'll grow out of it and become sick of peanut butter and jelly sandwiches in no time. If you can, try changing the food to make it healthier. In the case of peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, try getting them to eat it on whole wheat bread to help increase fiber and B vitamins or try making a peanut butter & banana sandwich instead.

Remember: As children grow, they tend to become less picky about food. Still, even as adults, we all have our own individual food preferences, so no child is going to like everything you serve. No matter how frustrating things get, it is important that you not use food as a bribe or a reward. Instead, start slowly by placing a small amount of food (1 tsp) on their plate, and to try and work up from there. Do your best to keep things in perspective and not try to make meal times a battle of wills between you and your child.

For more information:

Ellyn Satter: <http://www.ellynsatter.com> Ellyn is a well known author who writes about how to help children eat more healthfully. Her books include *How To Get Your Kid To Eat, But Not Too Much* and *Secrets of Feeding a Healthy Family*.

The Sneaky Chef: <http://www.thesneakychef.com> *The Sneaky Chef* is a great book filled with different ways you can "sneak" different foods into your child's diet. Her recipes include Power Pizza and a revitalized Macaroni and Cheese that sneaks cauliflower and zucchini into the recipe. You'll have your toddlers eating vegetables in no time!

www.KeepingKidsHealthy.com: Keeping Kids Healthy is a web site to help guide parents in making decisions about their child's safety and wellbeing. This site provides helpful information on nutrition, health and development of your child.