

TIPS FOR PICKY EATERS



What is the difference between picky eaters and problem feeders?

PICKY EATERS	PROBLEM FEEDERS
Limited variety of foods but will eat more than 30 foods	Restricted variety of foods and usually eats less than 20 foods
Foods child stops eating are re-accepted after a 2-week break	Liked foods that child stops eating are not re-accepted
Will tolerate new food on plate	Cries/gets upset with new foods
Will add new foods to selection after 15-25 exposures	Takes more than 25 exposures for child to add to selection
Will eat more than 1 food from most food groups and texture groups	Refuses entire food groups or certain textures
Typically eats with the family, but may not eat what family eats	Often eats alone, usually does not eat what family eats
Sometimes called a "picky eater" at well-child check	Regularly called a "picky eater" at multiple well-child checks

Adapted from Dr. Kay A. Toomey toomey@starcenter.us copyright 2000/2010



If your child sounds more like a problem feeder, please talk with your child's primary care provider about seeking help from a feeding therapist. If your child fits in the picky eating category, there are many strategies that can help you overcome this behavior.

Create a Healthy Feeding Relationship

The key to a healthy feeding relationship between a parent and child starts with the division of responsibilities in feeding:

PARENT'S JOB	CHILD'S JOB
What foods are offered	Whether it is eaten
When meals and snacks are offered	How much is eaten

- Have scheduled meals and snacks. This will let your child get hungry for mealtime.
- Limit meals to 30 minutes or less. It is up to your child to eat what he or she wants in that time.
- Don't pressure your child to eat. Meals should be enjoyable.
- Offer the same foods for the whole family. You are not a short-order cook.
- Offer only one new food at a time. Offer 1-2 foods you know your child likes along with the new food. Offering more than one new food could be overwhelming to your child.



Make Food Fun for your Child:

- Take your child to the store and have them pick out a new fruit or vegetable to try.
- Get your child involved in making foods. Let your child add ingredients, rinse fruits or vegetables, or mix ingredients with a spoon.
- Cut foods into fun shapes with a cookie cutter.
- Add flavor with dips and seasonings! Sprinkle lemon juice, lemon pepper, garlic, onion powder, Parmesan cheese or other spices on vegetables. Dip foods in barbecue sauce, cream cheese, hummus, guacamole or salsa.



CUT FOODS INTO FUN SHAPES WITH A COOKIE CUTTER.



Other Tips to Help with Picky Eaters:

- Limit distractions during meals and snacks—TV, phone, toys, games, etc.
- Be okay with your child leaving a new food on the plate. It can take up to 12 “tries,” such as smelling or touching, before a child may accept a new food. Keep offering them!
- Limit “grazing” between meals and snacks, including sipping on milk or juice. Grazing prevents your child from getting hungry for the next meal. Only allow water between meals and snacks.
- Offer choices. Instead of “do you want carrots for dinner?” ask “Would you like carrots or broccoli for dinner?”
- Be a good role model. Try new foods with your child.

Content Adapted from How to Get Your Child to Eat, But Not Too Much, Ellen Satter, 2003; Healthy Tips for Picky Eaters , USDA.