



Ten Tips for Picky Eaters

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Every parent has wrung their hands with worry about their child's eating habits. *Too much. Too little. No veggies. No variety. We've all been there.*

Fortunately, for almost all of these picky eaters, they grow just fine when we look at their growth charts at their office visits. Still, we'd like our kids to develop a taste for a wide variety of healthy foods.

Here are ten approaches to food introduction, preparation and parent interaction around questions of eating that can help our kids develop healthy diet behaviors and attitudes.

1. If they say they're full, trust it. They need not clean their plate. Don't bribe with food. Know what you can control: what is offered, when they eat, where they eat. They are in control of "if" and "how much." If a child feels rewarded for overeating, they will be on a path to obesity, so trust when they say they're full.
2. Routine is good. Serve meals at the same time every day. If your kids know they only get food at certain times, they'll eat when they get it. Provide milk with meals and water with snacks. For the snacks, try to incorporate two food groups. For example, cottage cheese and carrots or apples and peanut butter.
3. Try, try again. It usually takes several times seeing a new food (even up to 30) before a child accepts it. Just be patient and offer a new food a few times over a couple of weeks. Encourage them to talk about a new foods and what they notice.
4. Make it a game. Try to put all the (natural) colors you find on their plate. If you're handy with a paring knife, carve a carrot wedge into a shape. While they're having fun, they'll get loads of nutrients.
5. "Hire" a small kitchen assistant. When kids help prepare a meal they almost always try it. It can start at the grocery store. For fun, let them pick some

vegetables and fruits they find interesting. Ask for their help rinsing off the produce, setting the table, tasting for seasoning while cooking.

6. Follow the leader. If the parent is a picky eater, the child will be, too. You can't expect them to eat spinach if you don't!

7. New with the old. Try to incorporate a new food with an old one -- maybe peanut butter (old) on celery (new). Mix grated vegetables into spaghetti sauce. Add cut fruit to top cereal. We also suggest baked goods with grated veggies such as zucchini bread or carrot apple muffins (with the wheat germ, ground flax seed, etc.) as other ways to get veggies in. You can create "rainbow smoothies" to make different colors, spinach makes green, blueberries make blue, etc.

8. Don't eat in front of the TV. We tend to overeat in front of the TV and family mealtime is an important opportunity to talk together. Ask about school; tell them about your day; talk about weekend plans; share news about the extended family. Being together reinforces the kids' self-identification as part of a strong family. There are also several "dinner games" you can purchase that make mealtime more fun.

9. We all deserve dessert (but only now & then). Don't use dessert as a reward, and don't withhold it as a punishment -- especially for not eating other foods. These parenting moves will elevate sweet foods to a special place in our kids' minds and set them up for dysfunctional eating behaviors. Pick one night a week for desserts (in our home it's Friday).

10. Home is not a restaurant. The whole family get's what's for dinner. Don't worry if they don't want to eat what you've served. They won't starve. Preparing separate meals for a child sets them up to be a picky eater. Even if they don't eat, encourage your child to stay at the table for a designated meal time. Family meals are about meals and family. Many families cave in and give bedtime snacks to kids who don't eat at dinnertime. We recommend parents take a firm but empathetic approach to their hungry kids at bedtime and say: " I'm so sorry you're hungry now because you didn't eat your dinner. I don't enjoy going to bed hungry either but don't worry, I'm going to make you a nice breakfast in the morning!"

Kids grow just fine ... except when they don't.

For those few children who don't grow well, we have nutritional interventions that can make a big impact on weight gain and growth. If your pediatrician has been worried about your child's growth, here are some tips to get more calories into regular meals:

Add butter or olive oil to sandwiches, toast, cooked vegetables, cooked cereal, breads, scrambled eggs, and pasta.

Add wheat germ to hot cereals, meat dishes, cookie batter, and casseroles.

Serve peanut butter or Nutella (if no allergies - Nutella is hazelnut-based) on toast, graham crackers, crackers, apples, bananas, and celery.

Use cream cheese on crackers, bagels, bread or anything else you can think of.

Add mayonnaise or salad dressing to sandwiches, salads, as a dip for raw vegetables or for a sauce on cooked vegetables.

Add evaporated milk in place of whole milk in desserts, baked goods, meat dishes and cooked cereal.

Substitute half and half or heavy cream in cereal, oatmeal, cream soups, eggs, macaroni and cheese, or other dishes where milk is called for. You can even add heavy cream to whole milk.

Add sour cream to burritos, tacos, cream soups, potatoes, casseroles, dips, sauces and baked goods.

Add sweetened condensed milk to pies, puddings, and milk shakes.

Add hummus to pita bread or dip vegetables in it.

Add large green or black olives to salads, tacos, nachos, pasta or layer them on sandwiches.

Add shredded coconut to trail mix, cookies, cakes, sprinkle it over oatmeal or cereal, ice cream or yogurt.

Serve guacamole with chips, tacos, burritos, salads, or with raw vegetables.

Spread honey (only if your child is over 1 year of age) on bagels and toast, mix it with peanut butter, or use it as a dip for fruit.

If your child still has trouble putting on weight, there may be a problem with their digestive system, metabolism or a chronic progressive illness. You should schedule in with your child's doctor as soon as possible to get to the bottom of the problem.