

Helping your picky eater try new foods



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Summary: Is your child a picky eater? Do they refuse to try new foods, only eating foods they know and already like? This is normal, especially for children. Dealing with a picky eater can be very time-consuming and can make mealtimes stressful for the whole family. Fortunately, there are lots of strategies you can use to help your child enjoy all kinds of new foods!

Why is my child a picky eater?

There are lots of reasons why your child might be hesitant to try new foods. They could have dental cavities, difficulty chewing or swallowing, food allergies, or even digestive problems. To determine if your child is just picky, or if there is an underlying medical condition, the first step is to visit your family doctor. They will help you rule out underlying causes and connect you with other health-care providers if necessary. For example, a child with difficulty swallowing might need to see an occupational therapist.

Introducing new foods during snack time.

If your child is picky about new tastes and textures, the next step is to gradually expose them to new foods during snack time. Be patient as many children are picky about food. It can take more than 15 times for a child to like a new food! Stay positive and reassure them they don't have to finish a food they don't like, as long as they try it.

Steps

1. Make trying food fun and engage their senses. Ask your child to help you prepare food, and go grocery shopping. Ask them to touch the food, smell it or pick their own new snack based on what looks good to them.
2. Select one new food for your child to try. This makes the experience less overwhelming than trying a bunch of new foods all at once.
3. Make small gradual changes in foods that are familiar to your child to expand what they eat. For example, if your child likes strawberry yogurt, let them try strawberry Greek yogurt.
4. Offer snacks two to three times per day, for 15 minutes at a time, combining new foods with ones they already like. In between snacks and meals, only give them water so they don't fill up on other things like juice. Try to keep snacks snack-sized no matter how much your child has eaten at the previous meal so that they are hungry enough to eat properly at the next meal.

Introducing new food during meals

Eating meals together as a family is important because children learn through imitation. A child will be more likely to eat broccoli if they see their family members enjoying it too. Family mealtimes should be a positive experience the whole family looks forward to.

Steps

1. Give your child five to ten minutes before meal times to relax and do something they enjoy. This can be helpful if they are anxious about eating and trying new food.
2. Eat meals around a table to help reinforce the concept of mealtime and good table manners. Avoid distractions like cell phones, music or the television.
3. Give your child the new food at the beginning of the meal when they are the most hungry and likely to try something new. Each meal should consist of three to four food groups.
4. Keep meals up to 30 minutes long. Remove unfinished food within 20-30 min. Don't have fights or power struggles over food, as this makes eating stressful and can worsen eating. Don't pressure or force kids to eat.

Is Your Child Still Struggling?

If your child still struggling with picky eating? Does your child have other issues such as constipation, reflux or autism spectrum disorder? If so, then consider seeing:

- Your child's primary care provider
- A dietician, occupational therapist (OT) or speech language pathologist (SLP).

For More Information

Books

- Food Chaining: The Proven 6-Step Plan to Stop Picky Eating, Solve Feeding Problems, and Expand Your Child's Diet. Fraker, C., Fishbein, M., Cox, S., Walbert, L. (2007). Da CapoPress.
- Just Take a Bite: Easy, Effective Answers to Feeding, Ernsperger, L., Stegen-Hanson, T. (2004).USA: Future Horizons.

Advice Line

- Eat Right Ontario is a free service for those in Ontario where you can ask a health professional about nutrition-related questions.
<https://www.ontario.ca/page/ea...>