

# Dealing With Picky Eaters

Does your child say “Mummy/Daddy, I’m done” after two bites of food? Does your child eat only the same few types of food, day after day. Do you need to nag, coax or even bribe your child to eat his meals? If you said “yes” to any of these questions, your child is likely to be a picky eater!

**t** here are many reasons why children eat selectively and it is common for them to insist on eating the same few foods time and again. A child may dislike or even reject new foods due to unfamiliarity, especially if he/she has not been exposed to a variety of food at an early age. Picky eating can also be a child’s way of exerting his/her independence, and not so much as disliking the food.

So how can parents handle their picky eaters? We share some tips that would be helpful in encouraging children to eat a variety of nutritious food.



## PLEASING A PICKY EATER

- Make food fun! Involve your child in the food preparation process because he/she is more likely to eat the meal if he/she is involved. You can try simple things like baking mini pizzas, arranging fruit pieces and even grocery shopping.
- Make food interesting, attractive and appetizing by including a variety of colourful foods in the meal.
- “Hide” unpopular vegetables/fruits in other foods. You can chop and mix vegetables with pasta sauces, soups and omelettes, or mix fruits with pancakes, muffins and yoghurt.
- Look for interesting ways to introduce new foods. For instance, if your child dislikes cooked carrots, cut them into small sticks for him/her to eat with his/her favourite dip.

Children, especially picky eaters, may not be receptive towards the idea of expanding their food choices. As such, parents should establish realistic targets and try not to be too ambitious and impatient. The following is a list that parents should note:

- Downsize your expectations to child-sized portions. Serve meals in smaller portions.
- Expecting a preschooler to eat a wide variety of food is unrealistic and may not be necessary.
- Allow your child to touch or lick the new food. These are ways to become familiar with the new food that may encourage consumption.
- Instead of asking your child what he/she wants for his meal, get him/her to choose from a selection of healthy foods.



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This will give him/her a sense of control and he/she will be more likely to eat the food.

- Don't offer too many new foods at one time, and in large quantities. If your child is willing to try a new food, let him/her taste a little before putting a whole serving on his plate.
- Don't force food on your child. Don't worry if your child skips a meal occasionally or if he prefers eating a single type of food for a week. If your child is developing well and gaining weight and height, there's no cause for worry even if your child is eating small amounts of food.
- Don't rush your child through meals. Some children are slow eaters.
- Never nag, punish or bribe your child during meals and try not to use dessert as a reward. Don't let food and eating become a focus of tension between you and your child.
- Be a role model. Eating the new food yourself allows your child to see that it's okay eat the food.
- Be patient. Remember that it takes multiple exposures to a new food for your child to be familiar with it.

It is important for children to obtain the necessary nutrients from a variety of food to ensure proper growth and development. If your child still has problems with food, you can consider giving him/her multi-vitamins to compensate for the lack of nutrients. Please consult a doctor on the appropriate type of supplement for your child. Do remember that the key to prevent your child from becoming a picky eater is to cultivate good eating habits from young.

