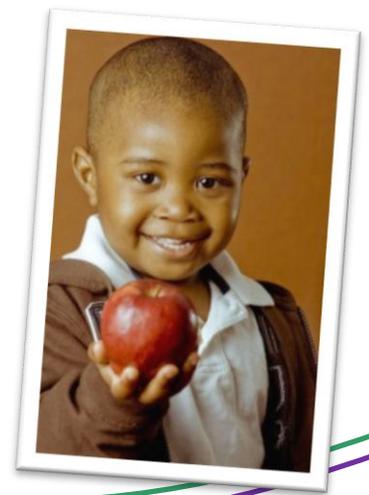


# Tips for Families: Picky Eating

Picky eating is very common. It usually means that your child wants to make some choices on her own. There is nothing wrong with your child. She just needs some extra care at mealtimes. Use these tips to help her eat well.



## 1 Be a Role Model.

Everyone in your home should eat the same meal at the same time together. A child watches and learns from others. When they watch you eat beets and enjoy them, they want to try the beets, too.

## 2 Turn Off all Media.

TVs, cell phones, video games, computers, and radios distract your child during meals. A child who focuses only on eating at mealtimes does much better in school than a child distracted by media. Take this time to talk to your child and enjoy being together as a family.

## 3 Offer Routine Meals.

Both you and your child have a role to play at mealtimes. Your part is to serve healthy meals and snacks at the same scheduled times every day. Your child's part is to decide whether or not to eat the food served. It is okay if your child does not eat a certain snack or meal. The child will get hungry and decide to eat at the next scheduled meal or snack time.

## 4 Make One Meal.

It does not help your picky eater if you make a different meal from the meal of other family members. Children will demand to eat their favorite foods at every meal. Include children in the meal planning and allow them to choose a healthy entrée for dinner such as veggie lasagna or a bean burrito. Stick to offering two possible healthy meal choices and prepare one meal for everyone in the family.

## 5 Provide Praise.

Try to keep mealtimes positive. Provide praise to your child when she or he eats well or tries a new food. A high five, hug, or pat on the back works well. You could use a sticker chart to record the number of times your child tries a new food. Forcing or bribing your child to eat does not work. Avoid using dessert as a reward for eating well. It gives dessert foods more value than mealtime foods and makes picky eating continue.

## 6 Sip Smart.

Children can fill small tummies very easily with too many drinks and not be hungry. Milk or water is the best drink choice. However, a child needs only around two cups of milk total per day. 100 percent fruit juice is fine one or two times a week served in a small half cup glass. Avoid serving soda, fruit drinks, punch, or other sweetened drinks to your child.

## 7 Cook Together.

Children like to learn new things and to help you in the kitchen. Let them help prepare meals and snacks by washing vegetables, mixing ingredients, or setting the table. Explain to them where food grows, how we cook it, and why it is healthy. Teaching children where food comes from will spark their interest in trying the food.

## 8 Be Patient.

A picky eater will take time to change behavior. Continue to serve and eat healthy foods with your child. It may take your child up to 10 times of trying a food before he or she decides they like it. Picky eaters are easily overwhelmed, so serve small portions and give them enough time to eat at mealtimes.



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