

Picky Eaters



We often have parents coming in complaining that they can't get the kids to eat healthy foods. There are ways of fixing this with a few simple rules. Meal times can be low stress and better family time. Here are some tips to get you started and feel free to ask at your next visit for more ideas that may work in your specific family.

Prevention: Picky eating often starts between 12-18 months when the child discovers that if they don't eat what is offered, mom will offer something else! RESIST this urge. Toddlers will not starve themselves. Also, it is completely normal for their appetites to go up and down. Meaning some days they will eat and some days it will seem like they didn't eat anything. Decide what you want the child to eat - fruits, meats, vegetables. Offer the food. If they eat, great, if not then they can wait until the next planned snack or meal. They will learn that food is offered at regular intervals. If they don't like what is offered, they can decide if they are hungry enough to eat anyway or if it is worth just waiting until the next time food is offered. Continue to offer water and milk but be cautious not to allow them to fill up on milk instead of eating.

Meal Times: Sit at the table as a family or just you and your child. Sitting at the table for meals regularly and talking is associated later with better behavior, less drug abuse and more responsible, mature teenagers. So, get in the habit now. Decide as a family what the rules are. Examples: if you decide they must clean their plate make sure portion sizes are appropriate, or must try a bite of everything, NO complaining about the food, must sit for the entire meal, must ask to be excused. Add whatever is needed for your family. If a child

breaks a rule then their meal is over. There is no discussion, no pleading with them to eat, and no arguing. If everyone knows what the rules are, there is no reason for the meal to be stressful. Enjoy one another's company, even if the child chooses not to eat.

If the child chooses not to eat, make sure they get some water for hydration and they can wait until the next meal. It is ok for kids to go to bed without dinner. If you have concerns about this or your child has any special medical conditions please speak to your doctor to make sure this is safe for your child.

Meal time pickiness is usually a behavioral problem and can be corrected by setting up your expectations and having appropriate consequences. If you have any questions, or your child is not improving with these interventions, please speak with your doctor. Every child is different and sometimes we need to get more creative.

Fun tips to get kids to try new foods:

- Let them choose the new food that they would normally not eat (by offering a few choices)
- Let them help cook it
- Allow them to dip it in anything they want
- Have a new food day of the week and make it exciting



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