

10 tips for ~~picky~~ eaters!

Selective

Until your child's food preferences mature, consider these tips for preventing mealtime battles.

1: Respect your child's appetite — or lack of one

If your child isn't hungry, don't force a meal or snack. Likewise, don't bribe or force your child to eat certain foods or clean his or her plate. This might only ignite — or reinforce — a power struggle over food. In addition, your child might come to associate mealtime with anxiety and frustration. Serve small portions to avoid overwhelming your child and give them the opportunity to independently ask for more.

2: Stick to the routine

Serve meals and snacks at about the same times every day, about every 2-3 hours and do not let kids graze on food in between. Provide juice or milk with meals and snacks only and offer water in between. **Allowing your child to fill up on snacks, sweet drinks, juice or milk throughout the day may decrease their appetite for food at scheduled meal and snack times.**

3: Be patient with new foods

Young children often touch or smell new foods, and may even put tiny bits in their mouths and then take them back out again. Your child might need **repeated exposure** to a new food before he or she takes the first bite. Encourage your child by talking about a food's color, shape, aroma and texture — not whether it tastes good. **Serve new foods along with your child's favorite foods — “Try Me + Like Me” foods together; start with those similar in taste, color, texture to their favorite foods and give your child opportunity to select both the Try Me & Like Me items.**

4: Make it fun

Serve vegetables (cucumber slices, carrots, broccoli) and fruit (apple slices, strawberries, grapes, melon, banana) with a tasty, low fat/sugar dip or sauce. Cut foods into various fun shapes with cookie cutters. Offer breakfast foods for dinner. Serve a variety of brightly colored foods.

5: Recruit your child's help

At the grocery store, ask your child to help you select fruits, vegetables and other healthy foods. **However, do keep the less healthy, competing foods at the store.** Further involve your child, at home, by offering for your child to help you rinse fruits and veggies, stir batter or set the table.

6: Set a good example and use “we” talk

When you eat a variety of healthy foods yourself, your child is more likely to follow suit! Also use inclusive, “we” language like “Let’s choose a vegetable for tonight’s meal” or “We always include one item from each food group” verses words to make you child feel alone, different, pressured or singled out.

7: Be creative with the mix-ins

Add chopped broccoli or green peppers to spaghetti sauce, top cereal with fruit slices, or mix grated zucchini and carrots into casseroles and soups.

8: Minimize distractions

Turn off the television and other electronic gadgets during meals, also put toys away. Serve meals and snacks at the table or a dedicated eating space. This will help your child focus on eating. Encourage your child to stay at the table— even if he or she doesn't eat. Consider having your child help you set a special timer to count down “table time”, so that they feel a sense of control; explain that we will enjoy snacks for 10-20 minutes and meals for 15-30 minutes.

9: Don't offer dessert as a reward

Withholding dessert sends the message that dessert is the best food, which might only increase your child's desire for sweets. You might select one or two nights a week as dessert nights, and skip dessert the rest of the week — or redefine dessert as fruit, yogurt or other healthy choices.

10: Don't be a short-order cook

Preparing a separate meal for your child after he or she rejects the original meal might promote ~~pick~~ **selective** eating. Keep serving your child healthy choices until they become familiar and preferred. Consider collaboration by giving them choices between items in each of the food groups to build a balanced plate. A weekly menu planner is an excellent tool for this type of activity.