



The Picky Eater

...every parent's concern

A picky eater is one of the biggest challenges for parents and caregivers of children. If your child prefers only certain foods and refuses others, you may feel that you have a war on your hands! Don't worry - many parents go through the same situation. Below are some strategies you can try.

Exclusive breastfeeding is recommended for the first 6 months of life. Continue to breastfeed on demand up to 2 years and beyond.

1 Never force your child to eat or restrict the amount they eat.

The best way to get your child to eat is not to try. Let it be their idea. Pressuring your child to eat can make their eating worse, and can lead to poor self esteem and body image. Forcing can make you feel terrible, too! Pressuring your child to eat takes the fun and enjoyment out of eating and turns it into a battle that nobody wins.



2 It is your responsibility to provide your child with nutritious foods, but it is their responsibility to eat it or not!

Controlling the amount and type of food your child eats simply leads to pressure and pressuring your child leads to more problems at mealtime. Caregivers and children each have important roles during meal time.

This is called responsible feeding . . .

You decide:

- What food is served
- When food is served
- Where food is served

Your child decides:

- Whether to eat
- How much to eat

It is your responsibility to set a meal and snack schedule but continue to offer breastmilk on demand for 2 years and beyond. As the caregiver you are also responsible to provide nutritious foods and to make mealtimes enjoyable. You must allow your

child to be responsible for eating or not eating. It is difficult for parents to respect the wisdom of their children's own bodies, but it is very important. A healthy child is not going to starve if they miss a meal or two. Children recognize when they are hungry and when they are full - probably much better than adults do. If you don't make a big fuss about whether or not they are eating, mealtime likely won't turn into a battlefield.

3 Recognize that forcing your child can take many forms.

Pressure can be forcing your child to eat, withholding food, or forcing your child to accept different foods. When you recognize how you may try to control your child's food intake, it becomes clear why your child may be refusing to eat. Forcing never works. It only teaches children to become good at manipulating their parents, to be embarrassed at their needs, to think something is wrong with them or their bodies, and to grow and develop poorly, both physically and mentally.

4 You can't predict how much your child will eat.

A child's food intake will vary day to day and child to child. It seems that the only thing consistent about your child's intake is its inconsistency! What is amazing is that as long as a parent takes the responsibility for offering the child nutritious food, the child will instinctively eat what they need to grow properly.

5 Recognize that your child may need more time to develop eating skills.

Your child may eat slowly, especially when they start feeding themselves and are learning to use utensils. Be prepared for messy meals. Most children love to explore the taste, textures, and colours of different foods. Self-feeding is challenging and fun. Allow your child to take their time at meals. Offer the food for a reasonable length of time (at least 20 - 30 minutes) and if they are not eating after 30 minutes, remove the food from the table without making an issue out of it.

6 Just because you don't like a certain food doesn't mean your child won't like it either.

Parents often won't serve foods that they don't like because they think that their child will feel the same. This is not always true. Offer your child something that you don't like. They may surprise you!

Parents also need to recognize the importance of role modelling for their children. Children learn from their environment and look to their parents for direction. The same thing is true for what they eat. If mom and dad don't eat or like vegetables, it is likely that their children will not like vegetables either. If you want your children to try new foods, have everyone in the family taste a sample.

*Try to make mealtimes special and fun.
Involve your children in meal preparation.
Enjoy good conversation with your family.
Experiment with different foods. You'll be
establishing healthy eating patterns that will
last a lifetime*



Common Eating Problems	Why it's a problem	What to do
My child refuses to eat.	It is normal for children to have different levels of hunger from day to day. Refusing to eat can become a problem when children use it as a way to get attention.	Respect the wisdom of your child's own body. A skipped meal will not hurt a healthy child. Remove the food without fuss after a reasonable length of time (20-30 minutes). Involve your child in food shopping, preparation, and serving. Supervised children are able to pour milk, make sandwiches, set the table, and stir the pot.
My child needs to have the promise of dessert so he/she will eat their meal.	This teaches kids that they need to overeat in order to get to the "yummy stuff".	If you make the "dessert" choice something nutritious and delicious it can be served with meals so it doesn't interfere with eating. Try puddings you've made with milk, fresh fruit salads, frozen fruit or homemade popsicles made with unsweetened applesauce/fruit cups.
My child gets something else if they don't like what's for dinner.	By preparing other foods, kids learn that they can be picky eaters because they get what they want. This tends to promote even more picky eating behaviour.	Sometimes foods need to be introduced about 20 times before children will decide to taste it or accept it. Be patient. Although it may never seem like they will eat broccoli remember...if you are only offering it once a week starting January it may take until the end of May before they are ready to take it on.
My child snacks all the time.	Snacks are an important way for children to get all the food that they need each day to grow well, but when they are served too close to meal times tummies can become too full to enjoy their meals.	Set daily meal and snack times. They don't have to be so rigid that it becomes stressful to plan around, but use it as a guide and develop a routine that children can get used to. Space snacks at least 1 ½ hours before the next meal.
My child eats the same foods everyday.	Eating the same foods all the time may increase pickiness down the road. If there is no variety, children may not get what they need to grow and develop well.	Offer new foods with liked foods. If a child likes cheese and crackers for lunch, offer other foods with it to add variety. If you don't make a big deal about it they will likely decide to eat different things when they get tired of the same old thing.
My child seems to be overeating.	Regular overeating by your child can lead to obesity long term. If you have concerns about your child's weight, always talk to a doctor or Registered Dietitian.	Don't put children on a diet or use restrictive eating. This can lead to overeating. Don't force your child to take "just one more bite" or "clean his plate." Try reducing portion sizes and avoiding high-fat sauces, breading, or frying foods. Encourage more physical activity. Don't use food as a reward - use a few kind words, a hug, a game, or a toy instead.



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My child drinks more than $\frac{3}{4}$ - 1 cup (175ml - 250ml) of 100% pure juice each day.	Children ages 1- 6 years who drink more than 1 cup (250ml) have an increased risk for iron deficiency because they tend to eat less when they are drinking high amounts of juice.	Cut back slowly on the amount of juice each day. Offer watered down versions and move to offering water more often. The addition of ice cubes (in a sippy cup for younger children) can sometimes get them more interested in drinking water. Freeze some juice into cubes and add those to water to add interest.
My child drinks less than 2 cups (500ml) of milk each day.	Children should consume 2 cups (500ml) of cow's milk every day to make sure they get the calcium and vitamin D they need for strong bones and teeth.	Try making popsicles from milk and frozen fruit. Blend up and add skim milk powder to help thicken and freeze for a treat. Make hot cereals and pancakes with cow's milk.
My child drinks more than 3 cups (750ml) of milk each day.	When children drink more than 3 cups of cow's milk they usually don't eat very well and may have problems with getting enough iron and other nutrients that milk does not offer.	Offer water in between meals and snacks for thirst. Continue to breastfeed on demand up to 2 years and beyond.
My child eats only a small amount (less than four 125ml servings) of vegetables or fruit daily.	Vegetables and fruit should be offered at meals and snacks, including at least one dark green and orange vegetable each day. They give children a lot of important nutrients they need to grow healthy.	Expose your children to a wide variety of vegetables and fruits. It doesn't matter if the vegetables are eaten cooked, raw, or even frozen. Children often prefer bright colours and crisp textures of raw vegetables. Remember: children are the world's best imitators! Your likes and dislikes are quickly noticed...and copied!



Where Can I Find More Information?

Haldimand-Norfolk Health Unit • www.hnhu.org

Eat Right Ontario • www.eatrightontario.ca

Speak to a Registered Dietitian for free by calling: 1-877-510-5102

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