

# PICKY EATERS CLUB

**I do not like mayonnaise or bread, and I won't eat anything that's red... or pretty much any other food for that matter.**

**Does this sound like anyone in your family?**

**Join the Club** if your kids only like a few foods and you want help getting them to try something new.

Stories that support your child's journey from selective to effective eating are: *Green Eggs and Ham* by Dr. Seuss and *Seven Silly Eaters* by Mary Ann Hoberman

## ARE YOU A PICKY EATER?

**Take the Picky Eater Quiz:**

1. Are you unwilling to try new foods?
2. Do you order off the kids' menu (and you're not a kid)?
3. Does shape, size, texture and every other detail matter with food?
4. Do you eat the same foods over and over?
5. Have you not liked a meal, but you've never tried it?
6. Do you pretend to be allergic to a food so you don't have to eat it?

**If you answered yes to any of these, you might be a picky eater!**

Don't worry, you aren't alone. Almost everyone starts out as picky eater. Learning to taste new foods, ordering off the adult menu, accepting different shapes and textures, and trying something you previously didn't like all take time to develop!



**You're in good company.**

Many children (and adults) have strong food preferences. Learning what we like and what we don't is part of growing up, but you'll never know if you don't try.

# NO MORE PICKY

First things first, stop using the word picky to describe your child (or yourself). Focus instead on repeated exposure to new or non-preferred food items. Exposure means seeing it, smelling it, touching it, watching other people eat (and enjoy it).

## STEP 1: CREATE A POSITIVE VIBE

**Part of increasing acceptance is creating a peaceful eating environment.**

Parents need to establish a consistent, predictable feeding schedule. Kids thrive on a routine – that’s why they do so well in school. Providing meals and snacks at more or less the same time every day lets kids know what to expect.

**This has a double benefit:**

**Benefit #1:** Kids come to the table hungry because they aren’t allowed to eat between set meal and snack times.

**Benefit #2:** As children learn what to expect, anxiety around mealtime goes away. By removing the unspoken stress of “I don’t know when the next meal is coming”, you give kids permission to eat if they are hungry and until they are full.

Work with the natural rhythm of you family – not everyone eats breakfast, lunch and dinner at the same time. Setting up this structure takes commitment and a little bit of planning. It’s the first step towards increasing new food acceptance so feel free to continue serving the tried and true foods your child loves during this time. As your family finds its “groove” start mixing it up.

## STEP 2: TRUSTING ME, TRUSTING YOU

**Learn to build a framework of trust.**

Once you have established a meal schedule, it’s time to strengthen your framework of trust. Parents and children have different roles.

**Parents:** You decide what food is served, and where. Serve meals and snacks at the table (kitchen, dining, or restaurant).

**Kids:** They decide if and how much of the food you serve they are going to eat.

When you follow this guideline, known as the Division of Responsibility in Feeding and Eating, meal times mellow out.

**Bottom Line:** Mom and Dad, you control what goes on the table and when. Kids control what they are going to eat and how much. Give yourselves time to get comfortable in your new roles. Persistence works better than pressure.



## STEP 3: NOW WHAT DO WE EAT?

### Focus on serving different food groups and different color foods at each meal

Try for at least 3 food groups or 3 different colors. Over the course of the day and week, your child will be exposed to all 5 food groups. Presenting familiar and accepted foods with similar “new” foods, helps kids take those tiny steps towards change.

### Fruits & Vegetables

Serve both fruit and vegetables at every meal and snack. Your child may eat all the fruit first, but little fingers tend to wander and eventually they will try the veggies. Dips and sauces sometimes help, but I find that cutting veggies in fun shapes and starting with the ones that crunch (lettuce, snow peas) works better. If little Sam (for example) has a favorite color, like orange, see how many fruits and veggies he or she will taste that are orange (orange bell pepper, tangerine slices, carrots, cantaloupe, orange baby tomatoes).

### Proteins

Animal and plant-based foods contain protein. Examples of animal protein are chicken, beef, fish, pork and turkey, but don't forget that cheese, eggs, milk and yogurt contain protein, too. Plant sources include all types of beans, legumes, tofu and nuts. Almost every kid loves chicken fingers (or chicken nuggets). To expand acceptance, replace the chicken with a mild-flavored fish (like cod or tilapia) and serve them “nugget style.” But, what else makes a chicken finger or nugget so special? Kids can eat it with their fingers! Drumsticks, wings, and even chicken skewers can all be finger-friendly and don't have to be fried to taste delicious.

### Grains

Serve a grain at each meal and focus on whole grains when possible. If your kids love white rice, serve it! Then mix in some brown rice or yellow rice, or if they are really picky—a longer grain white rice like Basmati. Got a kid who loves spaghetti noodles? You can serve a different color spaghetti noodle (like one made with spinach or black beans) or a different shape of pasta like shells, elbow macaroni or ziti. As children accept these new integrated foods you can get bolder and bolder with new grains (quinoa, bulgur) and textures (couscous, oatmeal).





## STEP 4: HOW MUCH IS ENOUGH?

**So many parents worry if their child is getting enough to eat.**

Take a deep breath, intake changes from day to day. Some days children are ravenous and others, not so hungry. Instead of worrying about how much Junior is eating at each meal, take a look at the whole week—intake tends to even out. If you notice your child eats more at certain meals, try incorporating more new foods into those meal times.

**A bit of guidance:** Kids eat about  $\frac{1}{4}$  of what an adult will eat, but may not eat it all at once. Large portions tend to overwhelm little people. Let kids start with a few spoonfuls at a time. It's ok to eat more of one food than another and to take seconds or thirds. The important thing is to let children eat if they are hungry and until they are full and to respect your established meal schedule.

