

PICKY EATERS CLUB

FAQs from a Family Dietitian

How we behave as parents can lead to picky eating, even as we strive to do the opposite. Feeding kids isn't always straight-forward. Ask yourself these questions to see how you can reduce picky eating in your home!



Is there a structure around eating in the home?

Creating structure around eating is usually the best first step (and sometimes the only action needed) towards a happy, healthy little eater. By structure, I am talking about setting a standard for how food is served, where it is eaten, and when you serve it. For example, food is served on a plate, at the table, at regular intervals that vary very little day in and day out. Little people adapt to the structure around eating in the home, which allows them to relax their barriers around eating.

Is there a consistent routine of breakfast, lunch, dinner and two snacks around the same time every day?

More so than adults, children need to be offered food at regular intervals throughout the day. Simple anatomy tells us their stomachs are smaller (their bodies are smaller than ours), which means they can't eat as much at once. Behavior tells us kids run, leap, jump, and generally expel more energy than an adult. (If you've ever gone on a walk with your child, you know what I mean.) Offer food every 2 to 4 hours – your child will eat if he's/she's hungry. It's also useful to brainstorm a few 'tried and true' meals and snacks so you can sprinkle them into your weekly routine. In our house, the kids picked a day when we will always offer dessert (for us, it's Wednesdays) so kids can know what day to expect something sweet! Having a consistent routine builds food security.

Is your child expected to show up for these meals & snacks?

Have you told your child he or she needs to come to the table, sit down, eat and talk with the family during mealtimes? Sometimes we forget that children aren't born knowing these social norms. We have to teach our children how to behave at mealtimes. That means laying out the expectations and enforcing them with a reward (time with you!). Mealtime is not the time for toys, screens or distracting music. It is time to connect and eat. Letting kids set the table (with your guidance if needed) helps them transition from playtime to mealtime.

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Is your little wandering around the house with a snack or drink in tow?

While I encourage giving your child free access to water, I discourage letting your child carry snacks and drinks around with them. Part of our children's healthy eating relationship with food includes knowing when they are hungry and eating mindfully. Distracted snacking and grazing does not build good food habits. Lives are busy, and days are packed, but taking 5 to 10 minutes to stop, sit and eat a snack will help your child focus on his or her hunger level. They can eat and be done. Set a timer if you need to!

Are children offered the same foods as everyone else?

Parents often cater, short-order cook or prepare a separate meal for the kids. We sometimes think that kids can't handle adult flavors, but outside of the ultra-spicy and super bitter, you'll be impressed by how sophisticated their little palettes can become given a chance. You will have to adjust texture for little eaters who can't chew tough foods, cut food into smaller pieces so it's easier to eat, but simplify your life and let everyone enjoy the same meal.

Is he or she nibbling/grazing throughout the day?

If so, your child is most likely showing up for meals with a full tummy. Then he or she can reject the meal without going hungry. As tempting as it is to chase after your little one with snacks all day long, the mindset of "better to eat something than nothing" actually prevents your child from ever feeling truly hungry. By spacing meals and snacks throughout the day, your child can come to the table hungry. A hungry child is a more accepting child. Even the most willful child will eventually taste what you serve them. It is perfectly OK to offer your child their favorite snack at "Snack Time" - just stop letting them pick at food throughout the day.



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Really Worried?

To support parents as the family adjusts to a more structured eating pattern, you can add a children's liquid multivitamin to yogurts/smoothies/milk. A multivitamin can act as a "safety net" for picky eaters so parents can concentrate on something other than the nutrients their child isn't getting through whole foods.

As meal and snack times lose their edge and your family comes together more often at the table sharing the same meal, your child will eat more whole foods, and you can decide when you're comfortable stopping the multivitamin supplement.

*For more information on how you can help you picky eater,
please visit our website for further discussion.*



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