

Picky Eaters

Is your child a picky eater? Does your child refuse to eat orange foods? Do they react to an all-time favorite food with “I don’t like this!” or simply, “No!”

Preschool children are characterized by bouts of asserting independence. What seems to be a “picky” eater child, may be a child’s early attempt to be assertive which is a natural part of growing up. Before a picky eater gets to be a problem eater, there are skills and techniques you can use to help mealtime struggles. Try some of these tips to help your picky eater.

1. Offer just one new food at a time. Let the child know if it will be sweet, salty or sour. Serve it with other foods you know your child likes.
2. Let your child decide the amount of food to try. A “taste” can be as small as half a teaspoon but don’t force it.
3. Some studies have indicated that young children are more likely to try a new food if they have the option of not swallowing it. Show children how to carefully spit the food into a napkin, if they don’t want to swallow it.
4. Many children must be offered a food ten to twenty times before they will accept it. Continue offering new food, don’t give up. Eventually children are likely to give it a try.
5. Be a role model. Imitation is a powerful force in learning. If you want children to be willing to try new foods, it is helpful for them to see you eating those foods also.
6. To encourage reluctant tasters, have them sit with friend or siblings who are good tasters when you introduce a new food.
7. Avoid short order cooking. Expect your child to eat the same foods as the rest of the family. Serve an unfamiliar food with familiar ones. This increases the likelihood a child will taste the new food.
8. Color and texture can make the difference. Most children prefer bright colors and interesting textures. Many prefer plain foods they can easily recognize.
9. Get children involved in preparing foods. Even the most finicky eater is more likely to try a food he or she has helped to prepare.
10. Whenever possible, include your children in planning, shopping for and preparing some meals. The sense of ownership may stimulate interest and curiosity and help “sell” that first bite.
11. Never force a child to try a food. Offer it, but if it is not eaten, simply take the food away and present it again at a different time.
12. Read stories about food to and with your children. A child may be more likely to try a food that was introduced in a story.
13. Relax and focus your attention on the positive aspects of your child’s eating behavior, not on your child’s food.

Source: Penn State Cooperative Extension , Better Kid Better Care