

# Mealtime with a Picky Eater

**Picky eating is common.** Picky eating can start at any age, but it is most common in toddlers. Almost half of children are picky eaters at some point. This becomes a worry when it gets in the way of a healthy diet, causes unhealthy weight changes, or upsets family meals and social situations.

## What does it mean to be a Picky Eater?

- Eats less than 10 total foods regularly
- Does not eat any foods of a certain kind (fruit, vegetables, meat)
- Will not try any new foods



## Tips for feeding your picky eater

### Start small with new food goals.

- It is okay to start slowly. A first step may be to try a different brand of a favorite food. Praise your child for trying even the smallest bites.
- Pair a familiar taste with the new taste. If your child likes strawberries, try dipping them in a new yogurt!

### Try new foods when kids are hungry.

- Try new foods first. Offer them at the start of a meal or snack. Your child can have a bite of a “favorite” food next, but always try the new food first.
- Trying new foods at mealtimes can be stressful. It may be easier to try new foods at snack time.

### Model trying new foods.

- Sit down and eat new foods with your child.
- Your child may be nervous or scared to try a new food. Seeing you eat the food shows them the food is safe.
- Remind other family members to support the child. If a sibling is always poking fun, it can be hard for your child to make progress.

### Try new foods again and again.

- Children may need to try foods over 20 times before they accept the food.
- Ask questions like...

*What does it feel like?*

*What colors do you see?*

*Does it look like anything else you've had?*

*What do you smell?*

- Don't worry if your child spits out a food. They may be learning about a new texture or taste. This doesn't always mean that your child doesn't like the food.
- Place new foods on the table. Placing new foods on the table and seeing others eat it introduces a child to food.

## Make trying new foods part of your typical daily routine.

- Set a goal to try a bite of what the family is having at every meal and snack. Your child will be more open to eating new foods when it is a normal part of his/her day.
- Offer rewards for good efforts. Every time your child tries a new food give them a sticker. Set a number of stickers that earns a special prize, like a trip to the zoo, a small toy, or a trip to a special park.
  - Always follow through with rewards you promise and don't give them the reward unless they earn it.

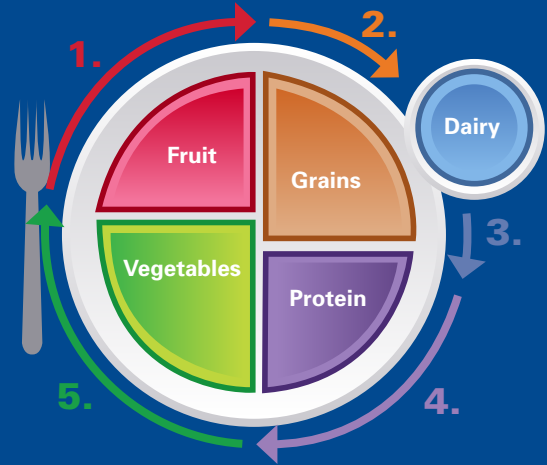


**Remember, your child is learning to eat, just like they are learning many other skills.**

**Be patient - it will get better!**

## Try this!

Try "eating around the plate." Take a single bite of each food on the plate before repeating a food.



## Remember when you first start to try new food, they may get upset.

- This might include crying, screaming, or gagging.
- Teach polite tasting. Show the child how to spit out food in a napkin. The child will feel better about trying new foods if they know there is a way out.
- Your child may demand sweet treats and snacks instead of other foods you are offering. Stick to your planned healthy foods.
- Your child may try to sneak unhealthy snacks. Try removing those foods from your home for a while.
- Talk to your primary care doctor if your child still will not try new foods after you have tried these ideas for a few weeks.