

How to stop picky eating before it starts

August 17 2021, by Rhya Strifling



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Summer is a popular time for families to gather for picnics and cookouts with lots of delicious foods. But for parents and caregivers, even the most joyous of family gatherings can be stressful when you're dealing with a picky eater.

Sometimes what parents think is picky eating isn't actually picky eating. Some [parents](#) might be under the impression that their kids are picky eaters if they don't eat much, but children ages two to five have a slower rate of growth and therefore have smaller appetites.

It's normal for children to eat small amounts of food at one meal—sometimes just a few bites—and then a larger amount at a later meal or the next morning. They learn to regulate how much to eat and won't starve themselves. If they are growing well on their growth curves, don't worry about how much they are eating.

Keep mealtimes relaxed. The best way to prevent a child from becoming a picky eater is to make mealtimes enjoyable with a variety of small portions of healthy foods. Mealtimes should be relatively short, and children should not be made to "clean their plates." Some children will exert their independence by refusing to eat if you force them, punish them or bargain with them. The more you make them eat, the more they might begin to refuse.

Provide your child with a variety of healthy food choices in small, tablespoon-sized portions, then relax and focus on your own meal. The less focus you put on what your kid eats, the better they will eat. If they say they don't like what you have prepared, tell them that's OK and give them the same food options as the rest of the family, then return to your own meal. They will either eat, or catch up at the next meal.

Encourage your child to try [new foods](#). A child might try a new food 10 to 15 times before realizing they actually like it. Don't be afraid to try new foods, but don't get frustrated if your child rejects them. The best way to get children to try new foods is to eat them yourself. Be sure to give them lots of praise and encouragement for taking even the smallest bite of a new [food](#).

To help children eat better at mealtimes, follow some of these tips:

- Try to limit beverages prior to meals.
- Schedule snack time instead of letting them "graze" throughout the day.
- Serve as a [role model](#), because [children](#) learn to feed themselves by experimenting with new foods.
- Sit at the table as a [family](#) to demonstrate healthy eating choices and habits.

Provided by University of Kentucky

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