

Dealing with a picky eater: 5 tips for parents

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Does it sometimes feel like your young picky eater is turning every meal and snack into an epic power battle—and you're just not sure how to get them the nutrition they need?

If so, you're not alone.

According to an article published recently in the journal [Pediatrics](#), up to 50% of kids may be described as "picky eaters." And while there's no one agreed-upon definition of picky eating, in general, if your child or adolescent is particular about the [food](#) they eat at least some of the time, you may have a picky eater on your hands.

"I think all parents have said at one time, 'My kid is such a picky eater!'" clinical psychologist [Rachel Busman](#) said in a recent [Child Mind Institute article](#). "It's very normal for kids to go through stages where they're a little more picky, especially when they are trying to assert their autonomy."

Experts at the institute note that picky eating is one of the most "common complaints" of parents. Here, they and other child experts weigh in on the topic with five top tips for parents of picky eaters:

Grocery shop and cook together

Involving your child in grocery shopping can help extend their picky eater food list to include novel items, Busman explained. When they are shown a wide variety of food flavors and options, it can open their eyes to new tastes and textures they might enjoy.

Similarly, if you scroll through recipe books or websites together and pick a new dish or dessert to create, it helps make eating different foods a fun adventure instead of a battle.

Avoid forcing foods

Cleveland Clinic registered dietician [Jennifer Hyland](#) notes that forcing

kids to eat food they don't like can make them doubt their own body signals surrounding hunger, especially when they're toddlers.

"Forcing food can cause your child to distrust their own appetite and lead them to believe that they can't regulate their own hunger cues," she explained in an [article](#).

Instead, allow them to eat until they're full—even if that means some vegetables are left on the plate. This also helps ensure that eating food doesn't become associated with stress and anxiety.

Have meals as a family

Both Hyland and the pediatricians at [Healthychildren.org](https://www.healthychildren.org) recommend eating together as a family, to help create a positive vibe around food. They also suggest cooking the same meal for everyone at the table and including at least one food in each meal that your picky eater enjoys, if possible.

"Try your best to cook the same meal for the whole family. The child may not eat all of it, but it's important that you present it, and that you set an example of trying these foods yourself," Hyland explained.

Take food rejection calmly

Teaching your child that unwanted food is still safe food is important, according to the Child Mind Institute. For instance, they may need to be shown that the tomato they are repulsed by isn't actually full of bad germs just because they don't like it.

One way to demonstrate this is to teach your child to offer unwanted food to others at the table. When your picky eater sees other [family](#)

[members](#) enjoying it, they're more likely to understand that it's safe to eat.

Have fun with food

You may have thought that a good meal presentation was only for formal restaurants, but as it turns out making foods into fun shapes and including a variety of colors in your meals can help make them appealing to kids.

Hyland recommends offering your picky eater something they can shake onto their food if they don't want it, to make it "more exciting." Additions like herbs, seasonings or seeds can help turn an unwanted item into a winner.

"Sprinkles also go a long way," said Hyland. "Sometimes it really is as simple as that."

The Cleveland Clinic also notes that a [child](#) may try a food between 10 to 20 times, on average, before they like it. This means that your patience and persistence in re-offering previously rejected foods to your picky eater can really pay off.

Hyland explained that, "The most important thing a parent can do with a choosy eater is to be consistent and not give up."

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