

When Your Child is a Picky Eater...

It is important that children develop healthy eating habits early in life. Here are some strategies to help your child eat well.

What to Expect

- After the first year of life, growth slows down and your child may eat less food.
- It's normal for your child to eat very well one day, and very little the next.
- Refusing to eat is sometimes used by the toddler to take control. It may have little to do with the actual food.
- A toddler may be happy to sit at the table for 15 to 20 minutes and no longer.



How can I encourage my child to eat more?

- **Schedule meal and snack times.** Set regular times for eating, and don't allow your child to eat in between these times.
- **Limit juice between meals.** Limit juice to 1/2 - 3/4 cup (4-6 oz) per day. Offer water between meals, which will not spoil the appetite.
- **Respect tiny tummies.** Keep portion sizes small. A good serving size for a toddler would be 1/2 a bagel, 1 oz. (30g) of meat, or 1/4 cup (50mL) of fruit or vegetable pieces. Refill the plate if your child asks for more, but don't be alarmed if it doesn't all get eaten.
- **Make every calorie count.** Some nutrient-dense foods to serve are peanut butter, cheese, chicken, eggs, and yogurt.
- **Don't be a "short order cook".** Serve one meal for everybody with at least one food at each meal that your child enjoys.
- **Let your child decide.** Once you have provided healthy foods, it is up to your child to decide which foods, and how much will be eaten.

How can I encourage my child to eat more variety?

- **Give food fun names.** “Apple moons”, “banana wheels”, “broccoli trees” and “cheese building blocks” have instant child appeal.
- **Offer a “nibble tray”.** At snack time, fill a muffin tin or ice cube tray with bite-sized portions of colourful, nutritious food in each section. Try cheese cubes, fresh fruit, broccoli florets and a handful of plain non-sweetened cereal.
- **Let children cook.** Your child is more likely to eat what he has helped to make. Toddlers can help wash and tear lettuce, scrub potatoes, or stir batter.
- **Serve new foods over and over again.** A food not eaten at first, may soon become a favourite. Simply place a new food on the table with the rest of the meal, without fuss. If not eaten, try again another day.
- **Eat well yourself.** Show your child that you enjoy eating healthy foods by drinking milk and eating a variety of fruits and vegetables.



How can I encourage my child to eat more vegetables?

- **Try raw instead of cooked.** Some children prefer raw vegetables. Slice vegetables and serve with a nutritious dip made from cottage cheese, cream cheese, or yogurt. Grated raw carrots are better choices than sticks or coins for children under age 4.
- **Disguise them.** Add grated or diced vegetables to spaghetti sauce, macaroni and cheese, pancake or muffin batter.
- **Plant a garden.** Let your child help care for the plants, harvest the vegetables, wash and prepare them. Your child will be much more interested in eating vegetables when he is involved in the process.
- **Make veggie art.** Create fun faces with olive eyes, tomato ears, and green pepper mouths.
- **Offer fruit instead.** Serve a variety of fruit to your child if she refuses to eat vegetables. Fruits and vegetables contain similar nutrients.
- **Go easy on juice.** Fruit juices are not a substitute for whole vegetables or fruit. Juices lack some of the nutrients and fibre of whole fruit and vegetables. Limit juice to 4-6 oz per day.

Remember, as long as your child is growing and developing normally, a relaxed approach to food is the best way to cope with your child’s eating behaviours.

Produced by Public Health Nutritionist/Dietitians in Ontario. Adapted by Public Health Nutritionists/Dietitians in Halton.
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