

Picky Eating Tips & Tricks

Toddlers can be picky when it comes to food. It is common for toddlers to refuse to eat new foods or foods that they once enjoyed. Some are very particular about which plate they use or how their food is cut. Others can become upset when their foods touch on their plate. Your child might not like every food you give them or on their first try. Research shows it can take anywhere from **10 to 20 tries**, and often more, for a child to like a particular food. We understand that this can be frustrating and feel defeating for parents, so here are some tips and tricks that can help make mealtime more enjoyable for your family!



- Be silly – make funny faces with the foods on your child's plate.
- Try eating the food first to show your child you like it and then let your child try it.
- Give your child a choice of two different foods to try
- Don't force your child to try a food – if they turn away or demonstrate not wanting to try a particular food, then respect it and try saying "you can eat it when you are ready". You want to make mealtimes a safe, enjoyable space, so don't force your kids to eat if they say they aren't hungry or even make them clean their plate.
- Prepare meals together. Having a hand in making the meal increases the chances that the child will taste her "creation." Have your little one assist with measuring, pouring, or stirring.
- Put new foods next to foods the child already likes. Encourage him to touch, smell, lick, or taste the new food.
- Start with smaller portions of nonpreferred foods. Serving larger portions can be overwhelming for children.
- Pretend to be a scientist with your child and ask them about the color, shape, texture or smell of their food instead of focusing on how the food tastes.
- Avoid bribes at the dinner table. For example, "if you finish your vegetables you can play with your LEGO's after dinner".
- Use cookie cutters to make sandwiches or fruit into different shapes!
- Have a routine – children thrive off of routines. Try to serve your toddlers 3 meals and 2 snacks at the table and around the same time every day. When they know what to expect, they feel more secure.
- Model and encourage your child to combine preferred foods with non-preferred foods (i.e. dipping veggie straws in hummus)
- Have a trash bowl at every snack/meal to model that instead of throwing the food, it can go into the bowl to be all done (goal of child having proper strategies to regulate and have autonomy over when they are done).

Adapted from: Palanjian, A. (2018). What normal picky eating in toddlers looks like.