

Overcoming Picky Eating

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Why does picky eating drive us nuts?

We know children need a variety of foods
We want children to develop good eating habits
We know they will like it if they try it
We think children should do as they are told
WE had to eat what WE were served
We are tired of serving foods they won't eat

There are three types of picky eating:



Food Neophobia

Fear of trying
NEW foods

Food neophobia frequently is related to fear of any new situation. Some researchers believe that it is inborn. Food neophobia often is seen in children who are shy and have high anxiety. The good news is that children with food neophobia often like foods after they get through the trauma of trying them. The important thing is to be supportive as they try new foods and reassure them that they don't have to like it. Respect the child's opinion about the food, rather than pressuring them to like it.



Finicky Eaters

Children who are particular about certain aspects of the food

Finicky eaters may want toast cut in triangles today and squares tomorrow. They may become upset if their foods touch. Finicky eaters might like fresh peas, but not frozen peas. Some finicky eaters prefer to eat all of one food before starting another. Finicky eating is a normal behavior and may be about trying to have control over something important in their lives. The good news is that finicky eaters are likely to eat a variety of foods if the presentation matches their expectations. It is up to you to decide how far you are willing to go to meet their demands. Cutting toast in triangles takes no more time than cutting squares. However, cooking a separate meal goes beyond the call of duty.



Picky Eating

Unwillingness to eat a variety of foods, including familiar foods

The causes of picky eating vary. It may be a way for a child to have some control in his or her life. It may be due to increased sensitivity to textures or flavors. For example, picky eaters may be even more sensitive to bitterness than the average child. There is evidence that picky eating can be prevented by eating a variety of foods during pregnancy and by breast feeding. When solids are introduced, offer a variety of flavors and textures. Children who are fed pureed foods for too long develop aversions to various textures. If it is too late to prevent picky eating in your child, you can overcome it using the strategies listed below. The key is patience.

Strategies for Overcoming Picky Eating!

- « **Maintain a comfortable atmosphere during eating**
- « **Offer less preferred foods with favorite foods**
- « **Talk about sensory aspects of the food such as the flavor and texture**
- « **Teach food related vocabulary, so they can explain why they don't like a food**
- « **Help children to make categories and link new food with familiar foods**
- « **Be empathic; remember that children have more taste buds**
- « **Have a tasting party (game) to introduce new foods**
- « **Show food prior to mealtime**
- « **Involve children in preparation**
- « **Let children assemble their own combination foods (sandwiches, yogurt sundae)**
- « **Help children see how the new food is similar to a food they already know**
- « **Graph children's opinions of the food**
- « **Offer the food many times (unlimited times)**
- « **Pick up child comments about the food and expand them.**
- « **Remember you are a powerful role model**
- « **Ask "If you try it you don't have to like it." (Even give them the option to spit it out.)**
- « **CONTINUE to offer rejected foods!**