



Feeding “choosy” eaters



Oklahoma Cooperative
Extension Service

Deana Hildebrand, PhD., RD,LD, Associate Professor & Extension Specialist
Christine Walters, RDN, LD, MS, Extension Program Assistant
Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service
Nutritional Sciences Department, Oklahoma State University

What seems “choosy” to you may be part of your child’s way of learning to make their own decisions. Eating less may also be a sign they are in a slower growing stage or they are not being as active as other times. The best way to know if your child is healthy is to make sure they are going to the doctor where their growth can be regularly measured.

The best advice: relax and be patient!

It can take 10 or more times of tasting a food before a child’s taste buds accept a new food. Your job as a parent is to offer a variety of healthful foods and decide when and where the family eats. Let your child decide which of the foods they want to eat and how much to eat. Don’t force your child to eat. If she or he chooses not to eat, she or he will probably be hungry at the next scheduled meal or snack time. Follow this plan and your child won’t use food to control you.



How you can help a picky eater:

- Encourage your child when they try new foods.
- Think about what your child eats over several days, not just at one meal. With time, most children eat enough different foods to get what they need to grow.

- Eat together as a family.
- Make mealtime happy. Turn off the television, tablets, cell phones and gaming devices and talk together.
- Serve one meal for the whole family.
- Avoid being a short-order cook.
- Try to include at least one food you know your child likes to eat at each meal.
- Serve unfamiliar foods with foods that your child prefers. For example, serve broccoli with cheese.
- Let children help in meal planning. Ask them which fruit and vegetable they would like at mealtime.
- Let children help prepare and cook food. Children are more likely to eat food when they help in the kitchen.
- Help your child explore new flavors by adding different herbs and spices.
- Make food fun. Cut foods into shapes that are familiar to children.
- Let children serve themselves. It may be messy, but they will more likely eat what they take.
- Trust your child to eat the amount of food that is right for them. If they are growing well, they are eating the right amount.
- Don’t make children eat everything on their plate.
- Don’t ask children to sit at the table too long. Younger children have shorter attention spans.



Stay consistent

Remember, it can take more than 10 times of trying a new food to a child before they like it. Stay patient, calm and consistent with offering foods at mealtime with a choosy eater.

Reviewed by: Jenni Kinsey, MS, RD, LD & Hasina Rakotomanana, MS.

References:

American Academy of Pediatrics (2018). *10 Tips for Parents of Picky Eaters*. Retrieved from: <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/toddler/nutrition/Pages/Picky-Eaters.aspx>

USDA. (2017). *Nibbles for Health*. Retrieved from: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/nibbles-health-nutrition-newsletters-parents-young-children>

E. Satter, *Feeding with Love and Good Sense*, Ellyn Satter Associates, 1995.