

How to feed a picky toddler/child

1. **Your child will eat when she is hungry.** If she does not eat her meal then she is either 1. not hungry and should not be forced to eat, or 2. being picky and should not be indulged with snack foods to just make her eat something. It is not uncommon for a toddler (or adult!) to sometimes skip a meal. Standing over your child and forcing her to eat will let your child know you are stressed about it. She could sense that and try to manipulate your emotions. Just make the mealtime pleasant and stress free. She is in control of whether she will eat; you are in control of what she will eat.
2. **Feed him only the healthy well-balanced foods that you eat.** If he is a “typical” picky toddler that only wants macaroni and cheese and chicken fingers, he should only be given that for dinner if that is what the whole family is eating. Remember the nutritional value of fresh fruits and vegetables.
3. **If your child refuses to eat your foods, do not offer other foods.** Even when not hungry, most people will be happy to eat a snack food that they really like. By providing your child with only foods they like you can encourage pickiness and can stimulate overeating. Try to avoid this. This will mean there are times when your child will eat nothing for a meal, and when parental guilt could set in. Remind yourself that a normal child will eat when he really needs to. Studies have shown that it takes introducing a food up to thirty times for a toddler to eat it. So be persistent and keep trying.
4. **If your child skips her meal, she is not to be rewarded with a snack later.** If she refuses lunch, for example, offer lunch again later. If she skips lunch just hang in there and be ready to offer a good healthy dinner. A healthy snack after a meal is appropriate if the meal is eaten well. However, don't use the snack as a bribe. If you find that she eats a particular meal well followed by enjoying a snack and then consistently skips the following meal then consider cutting that snack out.
5. **Control liquid intake.** Some kids will drink so much they won't eat. Kids should drink 3 cups of milk per day and about 2 cups of any other liquid such as water or juice. After age 2 years, the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends offering non-sweetened beverages such as water or artificially-sweetened drinks. Distribute the liquids throughout the day.
6. **Avoid too big of a breakfast.** Many breakfast foods tend to be high in protein and fat while others are high in sugar and low in vitamins and fiber. Some kids will just eat a large breakfast and nothing else for the day. If you see this happening you might try controlling the breakfast portion to improve the variety of foods eaten.
7. **If you find that your child is now eating at each meal but still refusing healthy vegetables, then you could consider stepping up your mealtime rules.** Try offering food in courses, serving the vegetable first. Let her see you eat your dinner in that order also. A good rule of thumb as you are introducing vegetables or any other food your child is refusing is this: one bite per age in years. Example: a two year old eats two green beans, etc. Allow her any dip she chooses for the vegetable. Let her pick which vegetable will be eaten (fresh is always best). Let her help you prepare it also. Increase your vegetable servings as your child realizes she needs to eat them.
8. **You must be a role model.** If you were picky growing up, let your child know that you overcame this because you knew how important it is to eat healthy. Let him know how you overcame pickiness. If you are still picky, let your child see you willingly eat healthy foods.
9. **If you follow these recommendations, almost all kids will eat better, but probably not without some disapproval.** Your child will “buck” the system. Expect pickiness and sometimes tantrums to escalate as you introduce this. Stick to your guns. Remember the value of eating healthy in this age of epidemic proportions of child and adult obesity. However, if you are worried your child is getting dehydrated or losing weight, please make an appointment.

*To see what types of healthy foods your child should be eating, refer to the Food Guide Pyramid at: http://kidshealth.org/kid/stay_healthy/food/pyramid.html

*A good resource you might find helpful is How to get your child to eat but not too much by Ellyn Satter.