

From Stress to Success!



10 Tips To Help Your Picky Eater Thrive

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The Truth Behind Picky Eating

What is Picky Eating?

The truth is - it's complex. Picky eating is an unwillingness to try new foods, and can include being selective about food or refusing to eat.

Children may begin having picky eating behaviours as they become toddlers, and start becoming skeptical of what they're eating.

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It's more common than you think - it's reported that nearly half of kids participate in picky eating behaviours

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Picky eating is a normal developmental behaviour.

It typically begins around 12-24 months of age. Around the ages of 4-5 as children mature and are exposed to new foods, picky eating can decline.

I repeat, this is normal!

Myths About Picky Eating

Once a good eater always a good eater.

This isn't always the case. Around 1-2 years of age, children stop gaining weight as rapidly as when they were infants, and their appetites begin to decrease. This may pair with newfound skepticism about what they're actually eating. For example, it's common for a baby to love a certain food, then completely reject it as they grow into toddlerhood!

“Just one bite” encourages them to try new foods and learn to like them.

This may work in the short term, but can lead to issues later. Picky eaters may be skeptical about the taste, texture, colour or smell of a particular food. If they're pressured to try a food that they are not comfortable with, they may start feeling distrustful and stressed at mealtimes. Research shows that pickier eaters don't respond as well to the 'one bite rule' but have better success with watching their parents/caregiver eat and enjoy a variety of foods at the dinner table.

The Division of Responsibility

The Division of Responsibility (sDOR) is a framework developed by feeding expert Ellyn Satter.

The sDOR recognizes the roles that both the parent and child have during mealtime.

According to this theory, children have the natural ability to choose whether they want to eat certain foods, and how much they want to eat. It is the parent's responsibility to choose what food to offer and where and when to offer it.

This will help your child develop the skills and confidence to learn to eat a variety of foods and honour their hunger and fullness cues.

This framework allows your child to exercise control over their own eating experiences, and will help them learn to listen to their bodies. It will also help them develop a sense of trust between you both.

The Division of Responsibility

The parent is
responsible for:

Choosing and
preparing foods

Determining when
meals are served

Providing meals and
snacks

Modeling mealtime
behaviour

Making mealtimes
pleasant

The child is
responsible for:

What foods they eat
from the foods offered

How much/ whether
they eat

Choosing what order
to eat foods in

Learning to eat a
variety of foods

Learning how to
behave at mealtimes



10 Tips For Mealtime Success



Put a Stop to the Pressure

Mealtime pressure can be difficult to identify at first.

What does pressure look like?

Pressure can be positive or negative.

Positive pressure is praising your child for trying a new food or consistently encouraging them to finish their plate.

Negative pressure is withholding sweets if your child doesn't finish their vegetables, or scolding them for not trying a new food.

Both types of mealtime pressure can make your child argue, bargain or throw a tantrum.

Let's look back at the sDOR:

- Your job is to provide meals and model behaviours.
- Your child's job is to decide how much and which foods they eat, based on what you offer.

Is it Pressure?

Common Forms of Pressure

What this can look like

Positive

Praising

Offering praise when your child eats a non-preferred food or finishes their plate

Bribing

Offering your child sweets or a preferred food if they finish a non-preferred food

Distraction

Using a tv or screen during a meal or snack.

Rewards

Giving your child a sweet or toy when eating a food they don't like

Frequent reminding

Keeping on your child to use their eating utensils or reminding your child not to make a mess when eating

Negative

Shaming/ Guilt

Comparing their intake to a sibling or another child who eats more or less. Guilt if your child if they don't try a food that another child was willing to try. Shaming your child for not eating a food you or someone else prepared

Threatening

Telling your child that they can't go play unless they finish their meal or snack

Forcing Interaction

Forcing your child to: touch, lick, smell or play with a food they don't want to touch

Language Matters!

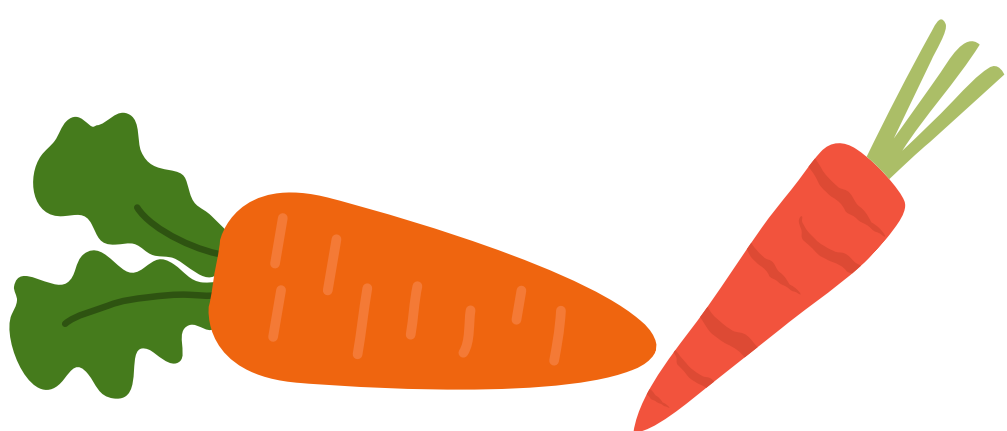
Aim to move away from labeling foods as a “good”, “bad” or “healthy”.

Children learn that there are foods they need to restrict vs. foods they’re supposed to eat. This can send the wrong message, especially when the “bad” food tastes really good.

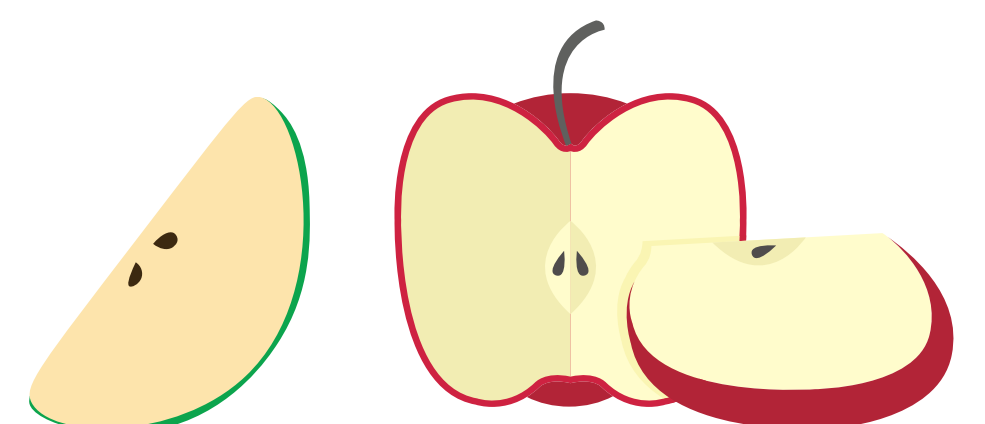
According to the sDOR, there is room for all foods in a well balanced diet!

As parents, we want to promote a positive relationship with food and eating. Our language around food matters! Neutral questions and phrasing can keep the pressure out of mealtime while sparking curiosity to try a food.

"Are the Carrots crunchy?"



"I'm going to eat my apples first, what about you?"



"Do pears have a big smell or little smell?"

Language Hacks

Instead of saying:

"Sugar is bad for you"

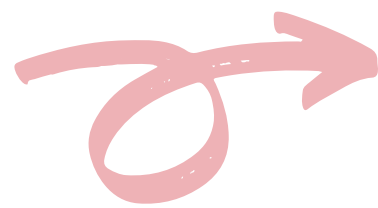


Try saying:

"All foods give your body energy"

The more we restrict or demonize sugar the more your child will desire it. This can promote a negative relationship with foods they enjoy.

"Eat your veggies first"



"You can eat your food in any order you like"

This can pressure your kids to eat food they aren't comfortable with yet. It can shift some of the control away from your child.

"Just one more bite"



"You don't have to eat if you don't want to"

Your child may associate food and eating with negativity and pressure. This teaches your child that pressure is needed to eat and that they should keep eating even if their belly is full.

Set up a Mealtime Schedule

Does your kiddo always ask for snacks and never seem to eat well at meals?

Another term for this is **grazing**. As a parent, your instinct is to feed your child when they say they are hungry. But grazing all day means your child could lose touch with their hunger cues. They may end up less interested in trying new foods if they are being fed snack foods on demand.

How can you get yourself out of this cycle?

Try a mealtime schedule.

Let's look back at the sDOR:

Your job is to decide which foods to offer your kids and when.

Your child's job is to decide how much and which foods they eat, based on what you offer.



"Mom I'm hungry"

"Can I have a snack?"

"I want a cookie!"

A Meal Schedule:

1. Lets your child know when to expect the next meal or snack.

If your child doesn't want to eat their mid-morning snack, they know the next meal is lunchtime. This teaches your child that they don't have to eat if they aren't hungry and gives them control over their appetite.

2. Helps to set boundaries around mealtimes. You can implement the 'kitchen is closed' rule in between meals or snacks. This prevents grazing.

If your child says they're hungry 30 minutes before their next meal, validate their feelings and tell them when their next meal or snack time will be.

"Mom I'm hungry"



*"Thanks for telling me you're hungry.
We'll be having lunch in 30 minutes!"*



Meal Schedule

There are many ways to set your meal schedule

Do what works best for your family!

The specific times you set for meals and snacks are less important than the time in between each eating opportunity. The time between eating is important because you want your child to develop an appetite.

8 AM	Breakfast
9 AM	
10 AM	
11 AM	Morning Snack
12 AM	
1 PM	Lunch
2 PM	
3 PM	Afternoon Snack
4 PM	
5 PM	Dinner

A common structure to follow is:

- 3 meals per day
- 2-3 snacks per day
- All spaced 2.5-3 hours apart

If children choose not to eat at a scheduled eating opportunity, they know that another meal or snack is coming soon!



The _____ Family

Meal Schedule

Time	Meal

Share your Mealtime Schedule
with us on Instagram!
@feedingpickykids

Eat Together!

Eating with your child allows them to learn different eating behaviors. This is a great opportunity to socialize and model positive communication! Talk about your day or favorite book, movies or sports.

Sit-down family meals help your child gain exposure and learn to like a variety of foods. This is also a great opportunity to bond with your child and foster a positive relationship with family, food and eating.

Studies show that children who have family meals:

- Eat more nutrient-rich foods
- Get along better with others
- Perform better in school
- Feel better about themselves



How do you implement family sit down meals?

Start by eating your family's typical dinner with everyone at the table (everyone can mean one adult + your child).

Try and minimize distractions like screen time if you can.

Your child may be more willing to try new foods if they see their role model trying the same.

There are going to be days where family meals aren't always possible and that's okay!

Try to have at least one parent eat at the table with your child. If you're going out to dinner and feeding your child before you go, you can sit with them while they eat their meal.



Sit Down Meals

Is it hard for you child to sit still at the table?

Start small!

Most kids can't sit still for long. You can start with expecting them to sit for 2-4 minutes per year of life.

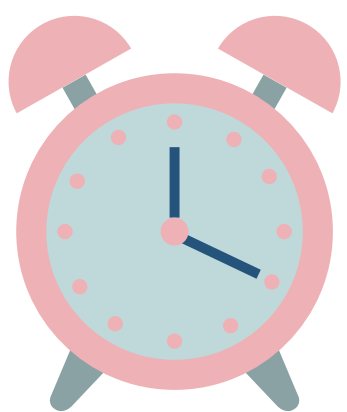
A 3-year-old: 6-15 minutes per meal.

You can start small and add a few minutes each day until you reach their maximum attention span.

Pro-tip



Have your child's food ready before they sit down, this way they can start eating immediately !



Seating Support

Your child's body requires proper seating support during meals.

A common approach



90-90-90 rule

That means when your child is seated, their hips, knees and ankles are bent at a 90 angle.

Your child should be sitting upright, and their feet should be supported on a footrest, step stool or the floor.

Postural stability is important because stability allows for better hand-to-mouth coordination and range of motion in the jaw for chewing (Toomey & Associates, Inc. 2002).

Seating Tips

1. Use a non-skid mat under the child's bottom to prevent sliding around.
2. Use a foot rest so that ankles are at a 90 degree angle.
3. Side supports could be used if needed
4. The table (or high chair tray) should fall between the child's belly button and chest level.

Appetites Vary and That's Okay!

How your child eats will vary daily, and that's normal!

It can depend on their mood, appetite, development, illness, activity level and more.

If a child eats very little during one meal or even in one day, it won't affect their overall health.

What's more important is the big picture – what do they eat over the whole week?

Their nutrition can balance out. If they have many weeks without adequate intake, talk to their pediatrician

or

make an appointment with me to assess your child's eating habits, growth and development.

What we
think a
GOOD EATER
looks like:



@Eat2grow.kids.nutrition

Eats everything
on plate

What a
good eater
ACTUALLY
looks like:



Eats as much
as their body
needs

Be Considerate, but Don't Cater

According to the sDOR, it is the parent's responsibility to provide the meal and choose what to serve.

It is recommended to offer **variety at meals** and let your child chose **how much of what type** of food they want to eat.

As a parent, be considerate of the food your child likes, and be sure to serve foods they enjoy at every meal. But do not completely cater to them.



I.e: If your child is asking for Mac and Cheese for lunch, but that is not what you have prepared. You can calmly tell them:

"Great idea, but Mac and Cheese isn't on the menu today, we can have it for lunch tomorrow."

Always Offer an Accepted Food

For a picky eater, it's overwhelming to try new foods. A safe food is a food item that your child will eat and is comfortable with.

It's important to offer a safe food along with new and unfamiliar foods for a few reasons:

- Allows your child to feel supported. They learn that you will always keep them fed in a way that makes them feel safe.
- Safe foods are available if they won't try or don't like the new food.

Your child will probably reach for the safe food, but may opt to try a new food if it's among good company!

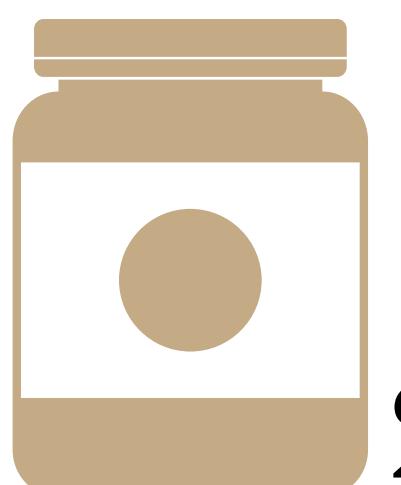
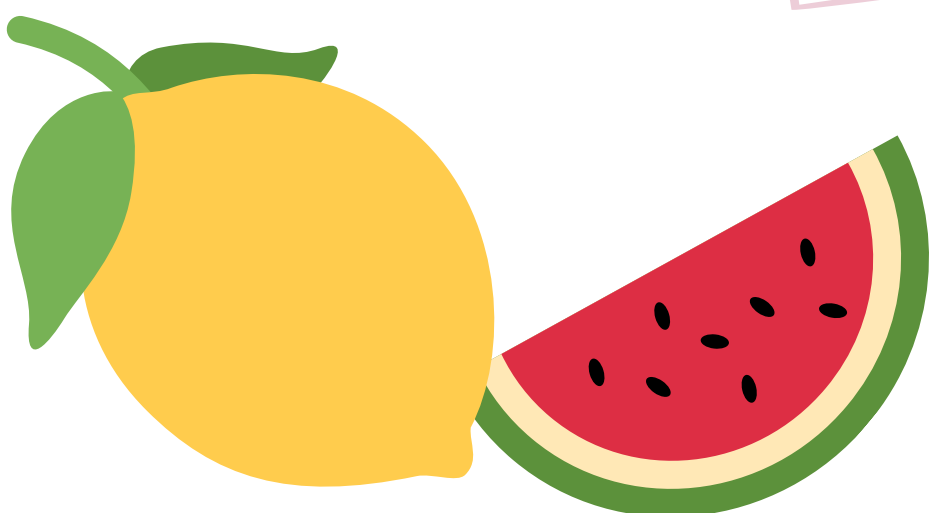


Get Kids in the Kitchen!

Include kids in grocery shopping and cooking. These tasks expose them to new foods, and help them gain learn skills to gain confidence in the kitchen.

There are many ways children can lend a helping hand:

Wash fruits and veggies
Mix/pour ingredients
Tear lettuce/ leafy greens
Help set the table
Apply soft spreads (eg.peanut butter)
Squeeze lemon onto foods
Accompany you to the grocery store &
bag a new veggie or fruit!



Make Food Exposure Fun!

Studies show that repeated exposure is the most effective way to get your child to try a new food. The more your child is exposed , the more likely that they will interact with it or even eat it!

It's normal for your child to try a food up to several times before they will accept it as a normal part of their diet.

Don't be discouraged if your kid doesn't touch broccoli on the first try!

Food exposure can take many shapes and forms – a common approach is **Food Play**.

Food play is a fun and creative way to encourage kids to try new foods without using pressure.

Food Play can Look Like:

**Using cookie cutters
to turn food into fun
shapes**



Try out new utensils



**Make art out
of different foods**

Need Help with your Picky Eater?

Veronica is Toronto-based virtual dietitian with an expertise in helping parents improve picky eating so they can start enjoying mealtimes again.

If you're interested in individualized counselling to help overcome picky eating, decrease mealtime stress and support your child's growth - be sure to visit her website www.eat2grow.ca



Follow Veronica's
instagram for more
content!



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References

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