

Picky Eater at Home?

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Is there a picky eater in your home? Parents have a responsibility of making sure their children grow up healthy and what they are eating plays a tremendous role in this effort. Not only physical problems can result, but behavioral problems may surface. Overweight and childhood obesity are concerns we are now dealing with and experts in the field of child development are tying the diet to behavioral problems as well.

Children need nutrients for growth and development. These come through a wide variety of foods from all food groups. We hear over and over that my child does not like meat, vegetables, or other food. There are so many foods to choose from, chances are the child will agree to something. Patience and persistence by the parent or care-giver are essential. You may not believe it now but your picky child probably won't always be picky if he or she is introduced to new foods on a periodic basis.

One of the most limiting things we can do to our children's eating habits is to withhold new foods because we do not care for them. Parents and siblings have a great affect on the likes and dislikes of picky eaters. If a sibling is making negative comments or faces at the table about broccoli, for example, little Johnny probably won't want to try it. If the cook does not like certain foods and therefore never prepares them, the children do not get the opportunity to determine their own likes and dislikes.

Children tend to be a little smarter than adults about portion control. They eat only when they are hungry and stop when they are full. Many adults do not have this will-power. We eat for many different reasons like boredom and the time on the clock. A child may ask for food when his stomach

feels empty or when he thinks he is hungry because the food looks or smells good. Young people have smaller stomachs. They may desire smaller portions more times a day.

Children have many more taste buds than adults. As we grow and age, our taste buds are less sensitive due to burning our tongues on hot food, illness, or even smoking. Therefore, foods taste stronger to young children. This explains why we may not find that horrible vegetable as strong tasting later in life.

Here are a few suggestions to help your picky eater:

- Arrange food nicely on the plate. Remember we eat with our eyes first. We usually want to try something that looks good.
- Serve small portions first—they are less intimidating.
- Don't give up on introducing new foods. It may take a while.
- Look for substitutes children will eat if they are persistent about not wanting to try something.
- Snacks might ruin meal-time. If you decide to serve them, they should be nutritious.
- If the child refuses to eat, allow him/her to leave the table. There is no sense having a scene and ruining mealtime for the rest of the family.

- Develop a routine—children want and need schedules.

Picky children can become overweight very easily. Like most of us, they may enjoy high-fat, high-sugar foods the most. Concerned parents might rely on these in an effort to get the child to eat something. When children are given many healthy choices, hunger will cause them to choose something. Of course an occasional “fun food” is needed. None of us wants to feel deprived.

Parents need to make note of the child’s eating habits, likes, dislikes, family influences, and timing. Any or all of these factors can be changed in teaching the child to make healthy choices and creating a pleasant mealtime for the entire family.

