

# Finicky Eaters

## *Encouraging good eating habits*

Children, especially young ones, are often finicky eaters. Food fads are common. So is avoiding certain foods and, at times, eating very little.

Food comes in all kinds of colors, shapes, textures, and flavors, not all of which appeal to children. Most adults have strong food preferences. So it is not unreasonable for a child to feel strongly about liking and not liking certain foods.

Children who are finicky eaters do not necessarily lack the nutrition they need. They won't starve themselves, either.

Getting your child to eat certain foods can be difficult. Many parents try to force children to eat something they don't like. That usually does not work and can cause power struggles that make mealtime stressful and unpleasant for everyone.

You can encourage good eating habits. Just remember that eating should be relaxing and pleasurable.

### **On Back**

**How to encourage your child to eat a variety of good foods.**

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## You & Your Child



# Encouraging good eating habits

## ***It is normal for a child to be a finicky eater***

Children may eat a lot some days and very little other days. And it is not unusual for a child to eat only one or two foods at a meal, every meal, for several days.

## ***Do not force your child to eat***

Trying to force your child to eat something he or she does not like will often result in a power struggle.

You should avoid getting upset at mealtime. Power struggles will not help you get your child to eat food he or she refuses to eat.

## ***Start a healthy routine for serving food***

What foods you serve and how you serve them are important to encouraging good eating habits.

- Serve only nutritious foods. Only serve foods that you wouldn't mind your child making a whole meal of. For example: vegetables; protein foods, such as meat or cheese; milk; carbohydrates, such as potatoes, noodles, and rice; and grains.
- Serve several kinds of foods at each meal. Offering a variety of nutritious foods increases the odds that children will find something they like.
- Serve small portions. Let your child ask for more.
- Don't worry if your child does not finish a meal.
- Serve only nutritious snacks, such as apples, grapes, raisins, and other fruit.

## ***Make one meal for all***

Don't make a different meal for your children than what you are having. Say, "This is what we are having for dinner. You don't have to like it or eat it, but there is no snack or substitute."

## ***Set a good example***

Most eating habits and food preferences are learned. And you are your child's most important teacher.

If you like chips and desserts, pig out on junk food between meals, and avoid eating vegetables, don't be surprised if your child picks up the same habits.

Both of you will be helped if you have only nutritious foods available in the house – then there is nothing to avoid or to limit.

## ***Introduce new foods gradually***

Offer a small portion of a new food with more familiar foods. Call the new food an "extra."

If your child does not like the new food, serve it several times as an "extra." If your child still won't eat it, stop serving it and try another new kind of food. A few months later, try serving the first "extra" again.

Sometimes food preferences change as your child grows older.

## ***Limit sweets and desserts***

If you must serve sweets and desserts, serve them only every once in a while, not after every meal or every day.

When you serve them, offer your child only a small portion.

Do not offer sweets or desserts as snacks because your child may learn to eat only the snacks and not the main meal.

## ***Set a dessert rule***

If you must have dessert every day, you should establish a simple rule that requires your child to finish the regular meal first.

Make sure your child understands that to get dessert the regular meal must be eaten. But don't threaten your child. Simply say, "You must finish your meal to get dessert. But it is okay to not finish your meal and not have dessert."

