

# Help for Picky Eaters

Mealtime with a picky eater is stressful – for parent and child.

Studies show that:

- Many parents think their child is a picky eater. In fact, their child's eating behavior is probably normal.
- Kids can learn to eat new food. However, many kids need to be exposed to the food – often.
- One in five pre-schoolers is a picky eater. If your child is a picky eater, you are not alone.
- One to two percent of kids will need professional help.
- Forbidding a certain food – like candy – often makes a child want that food more.
- A 2 – 3 year old child's food likes and dislikes are often related to what his mom likes and dislikes. It is also related to food a child never tastes because mom never serves it.
- Many children outgrow picky eating at about age 4 – 5.

It is *normal* for a 2 – 5 year old child to refuse to eat certain foods. Toddlers often fear what is new. This includes food.

## Tips for parents of picky eaters:

### Do:

- **Eat meals at the same time every day.** Eat at a table with other family members.
- **Stay calm during meal times.** Meals should be fun and stress free.
- **Allow your child to touch and smell her food.**
- **Offer new foods often.** Start with small bites – a tablespoon full. It may take as many as 10 attempts before your child will try something new. Do not give up.
- **Serve familiar foods when you offer a new food.** Your child will feel less pressure. Offer the new food first, then the familiar foods.
- **Make meals fun.** Offer dips with fruit and veggies. Use cookie cutters for fun shapes.

### Do not:

- **Allow snacks for 1 to 1 ½ hours before a meal.** You want your child to be hungry at meal time.
- **Force your child to eat.** Kids generally eat when they are hungry.
- **Cook different meals for each child.** Serve one family meal.
- **Use dessert as a reward.** It should be special for all. Instead, offer desserts for everyone two days a week.

Talk to your doctor if you are worried about your child's eating patterns.



*Brought to you by Parent Help Line at HSHS St. John's Children's Hospital  
to help keep kids safe, healthy and happy.*



Call the Parent Help Line. Help is just a phone call away.

1-217-544-5808 or 1-888-727-5889  
10 a.m. to 10 p.m., 7 days a week  
[www.parenthelpline.org](http://www.parenthelpline.org)

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