

Pleasing Picky Eaters

in the CACFP



Sources:

www.choosemyplate.gov

USDA: *Nutrition and Wellness Tips for Young Children*

National Food Service Management Institute *Care Connection*

My Plate 10 Tips Educational Series

Secrets of Feeding a Healthy Family, Ellyn Satter; MS, RD, LCSW, BCD

Raise Healthy Eaters, Maryann Jacobson, MA, RD

Children are all different types of eaters

A lot of effort and stress goes into making sure that children eat nutritiously. So much that many times, the pleasure of having a meal together never takes place. Your position as child care educator sometimes puts you in the middle between parent expectations and the child development and temperament. How best to help a child with picky eating tendencies begin to accept new foods is a challenge for both parents and educators.

Eating is a learned behavior. Babies get hungry, but unlike the instinct to suck, eating takes practice! Also, all children have different temperaments which greatly influence what type of eater they will be. The following are descriptions of some traits that will help you understand individual eating types and possibly change your perception of picky eating. There are several characteristics that make up our temperaments, such as:

1. Activity levels

⇒ Children with lower activity levels may eat less than those who are high energy children. Best practice is to encourage a child to self-regulate food intake based on recognizing feelings of hunger and fullness. Based on individual growth, all children will be hungrier some days versus other days. A child needs to learn to identify and trust feeling hungry and feeling full. The adults in the child's life needs to do the same!

2. Moods

⇒ Children have different types of moods which can range from outgoing to shy. Shy children may be less likely to try any new experience from meeting new people to trying new foods. A shy child may need lots of introductions to a new food versus a more adventurous type child. Many young children need to become familiar with new foods by seeing 10-15 times before trying.

3. Emotions

⇒ Children's natural emotion type can range from easy-going to stubborn. Some children cry more than others and take longer to soothe. Involving all children in menu planning and meal preparation will especially help the more stubborn types. Giving 2 or 3 choices of a food group, such as saying today we can have either broccoli or green beans gives a sense of power to children while accomplishing the goal of picking a vegetable.

4. Flexibility & Adaptability

⇒ Children have different levels of flexibility. Some children adapt easily to change, but many young children need more notice of transitions from activity to meal time. Making sure you have plenty of time for the meal and establishing pre-meal time routines, such as handwashing and setting the table help, children anticipate the transition.

5. Approach and withdrawal

⇒ Children are bold or cautious...or somewhere in between. If your child is more cautious about new situations and people, she may be more cautious about new foods. Best practice is to plan at least one component of familiar or well accepted food with a new food in a meal.

6. Persistence

⇒ Children vary in the length of time they will continue an activity in the face of obstacles without giving up. We all can become frustrated, but the adult must summon up lots of patience to keep serving healthy foods without pressure. Love and acceptance of the child's ability is the key, not insisting that a child continue to the point of frustration.

7. Distractibility

⇒ Children can have very short attention spans, but some young children cannot sit still for very long and are easily distracted usually by visual or auditory stimuli. Best practice is to completely unplug for meal times. No phones, tablets, TV and don't expect long meal times, know children's attention limits.

8. Regularity

⇒ Children can be predictable or unpredictable in terms of appetite and sleep. Some children are very regulated in when they get hungry or tired. Other children don't settle easily into regular sleep and eating patterns. Living with an unpredictable young child can be challenging and adults need patience to help children become as regular as possible.

9. Sensory threshold

⇒ Children may be quite sensitive to stimulation such as sounds, tastes, touch, and temperature changes. A child having trouble with the feel of their clothing or loud sounds may also be a picky eater. In some cases of extreme picky eating, work with an early intervention team, including a pediatric occupational therapist can help.



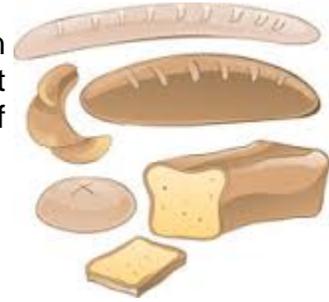
Understanding a child's temperament will help you adjust your meal time environment and help children learn to accept new foods more readily.



Eager eaters or picky eaters seen through the *lens of individual temperament*, makes meal times more about meeting the child's needs and less about what we think a child should be eating.

Eating from a child's perspective or why I love carbohydrates!

Educators and parents have long noticed that young children tend to love starchy and/or sweet foods, often describing what children choose to eat as the “white” or “beige” diet because of the common tendency to avoid anything green!



Seems there is some science to explain what's going on.

Sweetness Signals Safe Energy

When it's time to eat, I know you want me to eat the protein and veggies– but the sweet and starchy foods just feel safer to me. I might want to try some of the other foods eventually, but these foods are safe and satisfy.

What's behind it: Young children prefer sweet over bitter as it signals a safe source of energy. Breast milk is sweet, confirming a link between sweet taste and safe energy.

The preference for sweetness changes with age. In one study, school age children, teenagers, and adults were given a taste test with different sucrose concentrations. The school age children preferred the higher sweet concentrations than teenagers, but teenagers preferred higher sweet intensities than adults. This is consistent with other studies that show that sweet preferences decline when growth is complete.

It's Brain Food

I know you look at me funny when I am perfectly content with eating bread and crackers at meals and snacks. I don't want to hear how I ate everything when I was a baby. My body and growth feels different now. Someday I'll want more food combinations, but this plain old starchy food just hits the spot.

What's behind it: Researchers from Northwestern University looked at the energy needs of the brain from birth to adulthood. Using MRI and PET scan data, they discovered that glucose uptake by the brain doesn't peak at birth but during the slower period growth between infancy and puberty. Researchers believe that this longer period of energy requirements (glucose) going to the brain evolved so that the unique human brain can fully develop in key processes like synaptic growth. The brain relies heavily on glucose, which is why a child's brain uses twice as much glucose as an adult brain. Brain glucose requirements peak at about 5 years of age.

This may be why preschoolers and young school age children are drawn to starchy foods like pasta, bread, and crackers that easily metabolize into glucose for the developing brain.

Growth Made Me Do It

 *I know you want me to eat only one or two cookies, but that's really hard for me to do. I'm new to eating and I have a strong drive to eat them once I start. I get satisfied and I'm OK with not eating cookies all the time. Just let me know when I can expect them and I'll be happier.*

What's behind it: One study looked at sweet preference in children and found that a marker for bone growth showed that when bones are growing, children showed a heightened preference for the sweetest drink when compared to children whose bones stopped growing.

Exactly how all this works is still a bit of a mystery. Growing bones actually secrete hormones that can influence metabolism. Researchers suspect that growing bones are sending a message to the brain that there is energy needed for bone growth and signaling for that preference to increase glucose. This may explain why children on a very low carbohydrate diet for other medical reason do not grow as well as children on regular diets.

How This Information Helps

Understanding that carbohydrates play an important role in growth can be helpful, even a relief, for the adults in young children's lives. Instead of assuming that children are "addicted to carbs", we can understand their natural biological drive to eat them.

This elegant link between taste preferences and biological need may leave modern children especially vulnerable to the long-term consequences for overeating and tooth decay in our now abundant sugary food supply. However, if we accept sugar liking as a natural concurrent to growth, does that mean that we question our assumption that eating sweet foods is unhealthy and undesirable for children?

Once again, we need to look for the middle ground. If we restrict too much, it can result in what researchers call eating in the absence of hunger. When the craving for sweeter, starchy foods decrease with age, those children who were restricted may have forgotten how to listen to their bodies. But, if we allow kids free reign with food choices, their diet will be too high in sugar and refined carbohydrates.

What can we do? The best advise is for adults to set the meal schedule and offer a good amount of high quality carbohydrate foods from fruits, whole grains, and dairy, while offering sweets in a reasonable manner. We'll look at how in the next pages.

What adults can understand is that moderation in choosing carbohydrates looks different for children than it does for adults. This knowledge helps us stay consistent in menu planning and prevents us from falling into feeding traps that can produce the opposite of moderation: extremes in eating. It helps us not demonize foods but realize that all foods need to have a place in children's diets.

What to Expect When Feeding Children

Ages 6 months to 2 years

- ✓ Accepts most foods, even when an infant makes a funny face!
- ✓ Hungry— accelerated growth during this age!
- ✓ Honeymoon phase of feeding because child is open to eat to satisfy growth!

Best Practice: Introduce a variety of tastes, textures and flavors. No need to avoid spices and seasonings. Have fun trying

Ages 2 to 5 years

- ✓ Drops some previously accepted foods and becomes wary of unfamiliar foods.
- ✓ Appetite becomes erratic—growth is slowing. Keep portion sizes small.
- ✓ Demands more control over food choices

Best Practice: Don't make special meals or force child to eat. This stage is long but won't last forever. Keep trying new foods.

Ages 6-12 years

- ✓ Tastes gradually expand.
- ✓ Growth stable but increases as children hit puberty.
- ✓ Food choices begin to reflect a desire to be like friends.

Best Practice: Get kids cooking. Work together to manage outside influences. Don't be a "food cop".

Ages 13-18 years

- ✓ Further expansion of tastes and food acceptances.
- ✓ Periods of growth and hunger—second largest growth spurt.
- ✓ Wants to be different-risk taking can show up in food choices.

Best Practice: Stay involved and plan meals together. Let teens plan and prepare meals. Adults are still important.

Division of Responsibility in Feeding Children

Based on the evidence of years of research, when adults and children maintain a division of responsibility, mealtime becomes more positive for everyone.

- ***The parent/educator is responsible for what, where, and when to eat.***
- ***The child is responsible for how much or whether to eat.***

The parent/educator's jobs:

- Choose and prepare the food.
- Provide regular meals and snacks.
- Make mealtimes pleasant.
- Show children what they have to learn about food and mealtime behavior.
- Do not let children graze between meal and snack times.

Fundamental to the job of adults is trusting children to decide how much or whether to eat. We know children sometimes don't want to eat, or don't want to eat what is served, or are satisfied with a couple of bites. This is normal behavior. Patience and a non-judgmental attitude are essential.

If we do our jobs with feeding, children will do their job with eating:

- Children will eat.
- They will eat the amount they need.
- They will learn to eat the foods the childcare/family eats.
- They will grow predictably.
- They will learn to behave well enough at the table.



Children are interested and capable of eating and learning about foods. Children, like anyone, don't do well when pressured into eating by any means. A parent or educator must trust the child to know when he is full or hungry. Adults can help children learn to identify those feelings. No matter our good intentions, over-managing a child's eating will often result in the exact opposite of what we want for the child.

Change Your Meal Time Message

Let's think about how we talk to children at meal times. What you say has a big impact on developing healthy eating habits. If we do our jobs around the division of feeding responsibility, our messages will convey our trust in children and respect for their feelings. Here are ways to turn phrases that hinder into phrases that help.

Point out the sensory qualities of food for conversation. This is more encouraging for a child deciding whether to try a new food:

Instead of saying:

"If you don't eat one more bite, I will be mad"

Try saying:

"This is kiwi fruit; it's sweet and juicy like a strawberry"

Help a child recognize when she is full. This can prevent overeating:

Instead of saying:

"You have to take one more bite before you leave the table."

Try saying:

"Is your stomach telling you that you're full?"

Make a child feel like he is making choices. It shifts the focus toward the taste of the food rather than who was right:

Instead of saying:

"See, that didn't taste so bad, did it?"

Try saying:

"Which one is your favorite? Everybody likes different foods, don't they?"

Reward a child with attention and kind words. Comfort him with hugs and talks. Show love by spending time together.

Instead of saying:

"Stop crying and I will give you a cookie."

Try saying:

"I'm sorry you are sad. Come here and let me give you a hug."

Be aware that praise can equal pressure.

Instead of saying:

"Wow, you ate everything! Good job!"

Try saying:

"I noticed that you tried broccoli today. That was new for you."

Typical Preschool Food Behavior

The following can guide you in ways to involve children in meals that are fun and developmentally appropriate.

1– 2 year olds:

- 👍 Can drink from a cup.
- 👍 Uses a spoon and later a small fork.
- 👍 Very independent. Prefers to feed self. (Use bite-sized easy to pick up foods.)
- 👍 Eye/hand coordination still developing, expect spills.
- 👍 Has clear ideas about eating and not eating.
- 👍 Likes to watch and help.
- 👍 Imitates others.
- 👍 Can scrub fruits and veggies.
- 👍 Tears lettuces and greens and snap green beans.

3 year olds:

- 👍 May have food jags that last a short time.
- 👍 May learn to get attention by refusing to eat. (Do not give attention when child refuses to eat.)
- 👍 Asks “why”. Is curious and ready to learn.
- 👍 Can name foods.
- 👍 Capable of stirring and adding ingredients.
- 👍 Can shake a drink in a sealed container.
- 👍 Can knead bread dough.

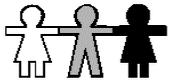
4-5 year olds:

- 👍 Handle dishes and utensils safely.
- 👍 Can set the table.
- 👍 Influenced by television. Asks to have advertised foods.
- 👍 Like to help and enjoys eating cooking projects.
- 👍 Can peel some fruits and vegetables like bananas.
- 👍 Can measure dry ingredients.
- 👍 Can measure wet ingredients with help.
- 👍 Can cut soft fruits and vegetables with a plastic knife.

10 Tips For Setting Good Examples

As such an important influence in children's lives, there are many things you can do that are fun and will help children develop healthy eating habits. These 10 tips summarize ways we can encourage even the pickiest eater to become comfortable around new foods. Most importantly, we trust that children know what their bodies need. Cook together, eat together, talk together, and have meal time = together time.

- ★ **Show by example!** Eat fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. Let children see you snacking on raw vegetables, too.
- ★ **Go food shopping together on occasion.** Discuss where fruits, vegetables, grains, milk, and meat come from. Let children choose between a few items.
- ★ **Get creative in the kitchen.** Cut food into easy shapes. Encourage your child to invent new snacks. Try "creating creature" snacks from different components, like veggies, cheese, and crackers.
- ★ **Offer the same foods for everyone!** Stop being a "short-order" cook. Always have at least one food that you know everyone likes.
- ★ **Reward with attention, not food.** Show your love with hugs. Choose not to offer sweets as rewards so that children don't think sweets or dessert foods are better than other foods.
- ★ **Focus on each other at the table.** Talk about fun and happy things at mealtimes. Turn off phones and TV. Make meals a stress-free time.
- ★ **Listen to the children.** If a child says she is not hungry, let her eat only as much as she wants. Offer limited choices. Ask "which would you like for lunch—broccoli or cauliflower?" instead of "Do you want broccoli for lunch?"
- ★ **Limit screen time.** Allow no more than 2 hours of TV a day, as recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics.
- ★ **Encourage physical activity.** Make physical activity fun for everyone. Involve the children in the planning. Play with the children instead of sitting on the sidelines. Set an example by being active.
- ★ **Be a good food role model!** Try new foods yourself. Describe its taste, texture and smell. Offer one new food at a time and serve something everyone likes along with a new food. Do not lecture or make a child eat.



Yours for Children, inc.

303 - 313 Washington Street
Auburn, MA 01501
1-800-222-2731
www.yoursforchildren.com

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TO:

May 2016 Nutrition Home Study

Pleasing Picky Eaters

Nutrition Training 2016 Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)

Successful completion meets nutrition training requirement.

**Complete all the home study questions
and submit to the YFCI office
within two (2) weeks of receipt of this home study.**

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