

Raising a well-rounded eater

Tips for parents who struggle with children who are picky eaters!

Picky eating is a common behavior for young children. As they grow, their appetite changes and they start to develop their individual food preferences and often like to make those preferences known! Picky eating is often not a cause for alarm if a child is continuing to grow well. However, it is important to help your child develop a positive relationship with food and family meals. This can take time and patience as your child explores and learns about foods. Here are some tips to help raise a well-rounded eater.

1 Center meal times around positive attitudes and positive conversation. Talk about your day. What good things happened? What are you doing tomorrow? What upcoming activities can you do together as a family?

2 Division of responsibility. As a parent, you are responsible for *what* is offered for the meal, *where* the meal will take place, and *when* the meal will take place. That's it. The child is responsible for *what* they choose to eat (from what is offered) and *if they choose to eat* at all. It's important to be respectful of your child's appetite, or lack of one. If they choose not to eat, you are still responsible for what and when the next meal will consist of. Your children won't let themselves go hungry, but it will take time for them to learn and understand the division of responsibility as well as identify their inner hunger scale.

3 Serve the same foods to everyone at meal times. Your life is busy enough, you don't have time to make two separate meals. When everyone is offered the same foods at meal times, adults can model positive eating behaviors alongside their children. Once children are offered "special meals" they may start to expect them at all meal times.

4 Deconstruct the food. You can still have the same foods and make them more appealing for a child. A simple way to do this is to deconstruct the meal into individual components. For example, instead of serving them a bowl of spaghetti and sauce with meatballs, separate out each ingredient and allow the child to choose which, if any components of the meal he/she will choose to eat.

5 Give your child simple, but fair choices with meals. Children like to feel empowered, and that is no different when it comes to meals. As a parent, the way you phrase your question is key. For example, "Do you want green beans or carrots with dinner?" This gives the child the power to choose but with limited options. Whereas, if we ask "Do you want green beans for dinner?" a child can just say no! Be sure to phrase questions correctly giving your child the opportunity to take part in the decisions for meals and snacks.

6 Get your children involved in the process. Giving them choices, like mentioned above, is a great start. Allowing children to be actively involved in the shopping or preparation process will make them feel more invested. Once they feel they are a part of the process, children are more likely to try new foods. Children can get involved in many ways: helping wash produce, stirring, helping meal plan for the week, picking out healthy snacks at the store, and growing produce in their own garden are just a few ideas. Check out the back of this handout for additional ideas for how kids can be more involved at any age!

7 When introducing new foods to a child, allow them to explore the food. What does it look like, smell like, etc. These new foods may also be well accepted if they are the first foods they try at the meal. Be sure that the other components of their meals and snacks are items that are familiar to them. We want them to feel comfortable. If they do try it, praise them, and keep a positive attitude. Studies show that it may take up to 15+ times to introduce a new food in new ways until it is accepted by the child. Be patient, it will all work out. But, understand that you don't like all foods either. So, it may just be a food that they won't like, and that's okay, too!

8 Start with smaller portions. This can help to reduce food waste and, in the long run, help save money too. Plus, starting with smaller portions can be less intimidating to a child. Remember, they can always ask for more of a food if he/she enjoyed it!

9 Make food fun! It's okay to play with your food a little. It gives children an opportunity to explore and be more involved in the preparation process prior to eating. Make lady bugs out of apple slices or make a bear on a piece of toast with bananas and raisins. Let their imagination run wild!



Kitchen activities

for children of all ages

Young children are full of curiosity and love to learn. Around the age of 2, children can start to help in the kitchen. Studies have shown that children who are involved in the food preparation process are more likely to try new foods. As children get older, they can build on their current kitchen knowledge and skills. Below are some suggestions as to how you can engage your children in the kitchen at any age.

Age 2

- Identify foods by their name
- Identify colors of foods
- Wipe down tables
- Assist with handing items to an adult to be put away after shopping
- Bring things to the trash
- Assist with a cook book by turning the pages (when asked)
- Create fun creatures and faces with fruits and vegetables
- Wash fruits and vegetables under running water

Age 3 Everything 2 year olds can do, plus:

- Add ingredients to a recipe
- Have conversations about cooking
- Scoop or mash ingredients (graham crackers, mashed potatoes, etc.)
- Stir batter
- Knead dough
- Count foods and ingredients
- Help assemble foods (such as pizza, sandwiches, etc)

Age 4 Everything 3 year olds can do, plus:

- Peel foods such as hard-boiled eggs, bananas, cuties, etc.
- Set the table
- Crack an egg
- Measure dry ingredients
- Assemble more complex foods, such as larger salads, help with lasagna, etc.

Age 5 Everything 4 year olds can do, plus:

- Measure out liquid ingredients
- Cut soft fruits and vegetables, (such as bananas) with kid-friendly utensils
- Help push buttons on a food processor
- Scoop batter into muffin tins
- Help meal plan
- Help pack their lunch for school



CREATED BY TRUSTED
REGISTERED DIETITIANS

[hornbachers.com/new/
good4you](https://hornbachers.com/new/good4you)