

Essentials of Helping a Child with Extreme Picky Eating

There are [many reasons](#) why a child might not eat enough quantity or variety to support healthy emotional, physical, or social development. These are [complex issues](#), not the result of a child just being naughty. Help a child with [extreme picky eating](#) by reducing anxiety and [supporting appetite](#) with routine and pleasant meals. Progress may take [longer than you'd](#) like, but pressure, bribes, rewards, threats, and even praise can slow the process. Here are some ways to help children learn to enjoy new foods, and eat the right amount for healthy growth. (For more, read [Helping Your Child with Extreme Picky Eating.](#))

- Rotate a variety of foods at meals and snacks, including foods the family enjoys. Use this [food preferences](#) list to help with ideas of what to serve.
- Offer foods **many ways, many times**. Consider blueberries: rotate frozen, fresh, in smoothies, in pancakes, muffins, jam, freeze-dried... Think of textures and flavors your child likes now and bridge to new opportunities.
- Include protein, fat, and carbs at meals and snacks, with one to two choices the child usually eats (rice, applesauce, bread, crackers, peas, and so on).
- Offer sit-down meals and snacks roughly every 2-3 hours for younger children and every 3-4 hours for older. Limit eating on-the-go. Most of the time, don't allow food or drink between meals and snacks, other than water.
- Eat together as much as possible. Children eating with one loving adult is a family meal.
- Keep a paper napkin at everyone's place setting. A child is more likely to try a food if she knows she can spit it out. Don't remind multiple times as this can turn into pressure.
- Sauces, dips, and condiments are your friend. Children often enjoy dipping and sprinkling. Think of them as training wheels and have your child's favorites on the table at every meal and snack.
- Allow the child to serve himself as he is able. Serve ["family" or "buffet" style](#).
- **Don't ask or insist she try a bite, lick or touch a food. Try not to praise if she does, or comment on what or how much she is (or isn't) eating.** [Here are some words](#) that help avoid battles.
- Offer familiar foods with new foods. Does he have a favorite cracker? Try hummus for dipping.
- Ask ["What's important now?"](#) If growth is a serious concern, allow children to fill up on familiar foods, even if it's just bread or sweeter items for now. If anxiety is the main issue, focus on pleasant mealtimes.
- [Minimize distractions while eating](#): turn off screens and phones and put pets in another room.
- **Avoid power struggle and conflict around food.** Research shows [that kids pressured to eat more tend to eat less](#), and kids pushed to eat fruits and veggies tend to eat less of those (but do keep offering them!).
- Don't make her eat certain amounts of certain foods or eat foods in any order.
- Model enjoying a variety of foods, good manners, feeling good about yourself, and having fun being active.
- Make mealtime pleasant, and include the child in conversation. Limit mealtimes to about 30-40 minutes.
- When kids say, "Yuck!" try, "You don't have to eat it; please just say 'no thank you.'"
- Try restaurants with buffets, or grocers with samples such as Costco, Trader Joe's, or Whole Foods.
- Let children help with gardening, cooking, and baking. It's great exposure and they might just try a new food.
- If you are still struggling, [find the right help for your family](#).