

# Feeding Your Picky Eater

## What a toddler is like

Toddlers don't like new food. But they learn to like it, if you give them time. They need to see it on the table and see you eating it.

What toddlers like one day, they don't like the next. They can eat a lot one day and hardly anything the next. They don't eat some of everything at a meal like you do—they eat only one or two foods.



## What a meal should provide

Offer at least one food from each of the four food groups at every meal: a meat or other protein source, milk, a fruit or vegetable, bread or other grain product, and let your child pick and choose from what's available.

Toddlers need a helping only 1/4 to 1/3 the size of an adult's, or one tablespoon per year of age up to 5 years.

## Feeding for comfort

Don't use food to try to make your child feel better when he skins his knee, gets his feelings hurt, or is cranky. If you do, he'll learn to eat when he gets upset.

## Preventing choking

Children under age 3 have a higher risk of choking

- Eat with your child
- Have your toddler sit down while eating
- Keep things calm at meal time
- Change the shape and size of some foods: slice hot dogs the long way, cut grapes into four pieces
- Stay away from hard, round foods like nuts, gum drops, raw carrots, jelly beans, etc.



## Saying "No" to new foods

Children often refuse new foods. Don't force your child to try new foods. It's awful for children to swallow foods they don't like. Take the mystery out of the food by talking about it and by letting your child help with its preparation. If a food is refused, calmly remove it. Then try serving it another day. It may, take up to 10 attempts before a new food is accepted. Promising rewards for trying a new food is not a good idea. Your child may assume there is a need for a reward or that they will always be rewarded for eating that food.

## The golden rule

As a parent you decide what food to buy and serve and the times for eating. Your child decides what and how much to eat if at all.

## What your preschooler is like

Your preschooler is *out to please you*. She thinks you're great, that you know all the answers. She gets ideas from day care, friends and TV. She wants to pick out snacks at the grocery store. But what you say about food selection is all-important.

Your preschooler *pays attention to what you do*. She imitates you. When she sees you eating green beans, she'll eat green beans, too.

Your preschooler *sticks to business*. She wants to learn and grow up in all areas of her life—including eating. When she's hungry, she pays attention to her eating. When she gets full, she loses interest in food.

## Becoming a good eater

Eating, like everything else in your child's life, is a skill that she learns a little at a time. As a preschooler she's better now at chewing and swallowing. She manages a fork and spoon pretty well, using her fingers to push peas onto the spoon or to pick up pieces of meat. She's neater, too, and drinks from a cup without spilling much, although she doesn't have the fine muscle control to cut meat or eat spaghetti neatly.

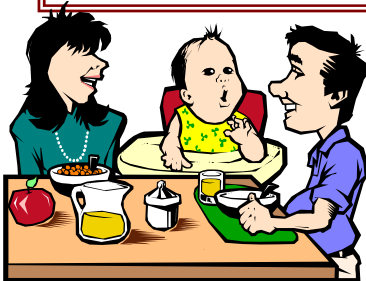
A preschooler can get the nutrients she needs from a helping only one-third to one-half the size of an adult's.

## Food waste

When your child is just learning to like new foods, you will have more food waste. She/he'll take food on her plate and eat just a bit, or not eat it at all. Or she/he won't be very good at knowing ahead of time how much she will eat, and she'll serve her/himself too much. You can remind her, gently, not to take so much, but you shouldn't make her/him clean up her plate.

In the long run, your child will waste less food if you don't get pushy. She'll learn to like more foods, and she'll take responsibility for her own eating.

Your child should be able to eat enough during meals to be satisfied until snack time.



## Food jags

A "food jag" is when your child will eat only one food for several days. Keep in mind that you are the one who plans and prepares the meals. Continue to offer the favourite food as part of the meal or limit use of that food to one meal such as peanut butter only at breakfast. Food jags don't last long and most children will soon return to a varied diet.

## Refusing vegetables

Children commonly refuse vegetables, especially cooked ones. Over cooked vegetables lose their flavour, colour and nutrients. To improve the acceptance of vegetables:

- Serve them raw with a dip
- Partially cook them
- Serve in different ways: as juice, finger food, various shapes
- Let children grow their own
- Set a good example by eating your vegetables.

## Your responsibilities as a parent

- Buy and prepare nutritious meals
- Offer food to your child in a calm, neutral way. Don't force food on him/her.
- Control the timing of meals and snacks. Your child's stomach is small and his energy needs are high, so he should have three meals a day with planned snacks in between. Don't let him panhandle for food at other times.
- Don't short order cook when she demands something different than what's already on the table.
- Make family meals pleasant  
It's important to include your children in family meals. Turn off the television and make meals nice times. Don't argue scold or fight at meal times. Do your best to not pressure your child to eat.
- Present foods in a form your child can eat. A toddler can eat most foods from the family table. But he still needs you to make some changes in the food so he can eat it better. Make food moist, cut meat finely.
- Let him eat in his own way. If you let your child look, feel, mash, and smell the food, he'll like it better. However, sometimes toddlers just mess around to get you to react. Then it's time to let him get down from the table.
- Don't make your child eat everything on his plate.
- Help your child pay attention to his eating. Have some quiet time before it's time to eat. Your child needs to be calm, well-rested, and hungry to eat well.
- Help your child learn to behave nicely at the table.

