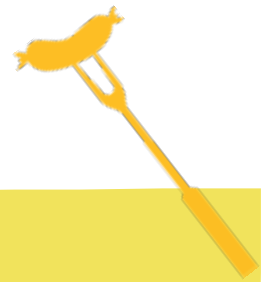


The Picky Eater

Mealtime Difficulties With Young Children



Background

Up to 35% of toddlers and preschoolers are described by their parents as 'picky' eaters. Children's feeding and eating problems are a frequent cause of family conflict and can cause tremendous concern for parents. However, the majority of these children have an appetite that is appropriate for their age and rate of growth.

Between two and five years of age, weight gain slows down. During this period most toddlers and preschoolers experience a decrease in their appetite. Unless your child begins to lose weight, he is likely getting enough calories!

Most picky eaters are not born that way. Parental efforts to make small eaters eat more may have the opposite effect. That is, caregivers may pressure children to eat without being aware of the physiological decrease in appetite that occurs between one and five years of age.

As toddlers struggle to develop a sense of autonomy, they prefer self-feeding and become selective in their choice of foods. If pressured or forced to eat, children's need for autonomy may lead them to resist eating.

Young children tend to be **neophobic**, meaning they do not like new foods, and are often perceived as picky eaters by their parents. Despite the initially negative reactions to new foods, children do learn to accept them with time and repeated, neutral exposures.

Management

1. While parents are responsible for which foods children are offered to eat, the child should be responsible for how much to eat.
2. Give, initially, relatively small portions of each food at meals. A good rule of thumb is to offer one tablespoon of each food per year of the child's age and to serve more food according to the child's appetite.
3. Snacks should be given mid-way through meals. Children should NOT be allowed to graze throughout the day or to drink an excessive amount of milk or juice. Do not use food to reward your child throughout the day.
4. Limit toddler's table time to 20 minutes. When mealtime is over, all food should be removed, and only be offered again at the next planned meal or snack.
5. Distractions such as toys, tablets, or television at the table should not be permitted during mealtimes. Eat as a family at the table as often as possible.
6. Meals should be pleasant family times. Parents should try not to make discipline an issue at mealtime.
7. If your child throws food or pushes food away, ignore this behaviour.
8. Work out a daily routine of three meals and two or three snacks that fits around your toddler's daytime sleep pattern. Toddlers thrive on routine and knowing what to expect. Do not offer food outside this schedule.
9. Make it fun! Serve foods your toddler does not like with a favourite topping or sauce.
10. Remove the plate if your child simply refuses to eat, but don't allow him to leave the table until everyone else is finished, and don't give him a snack within the next hour.



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