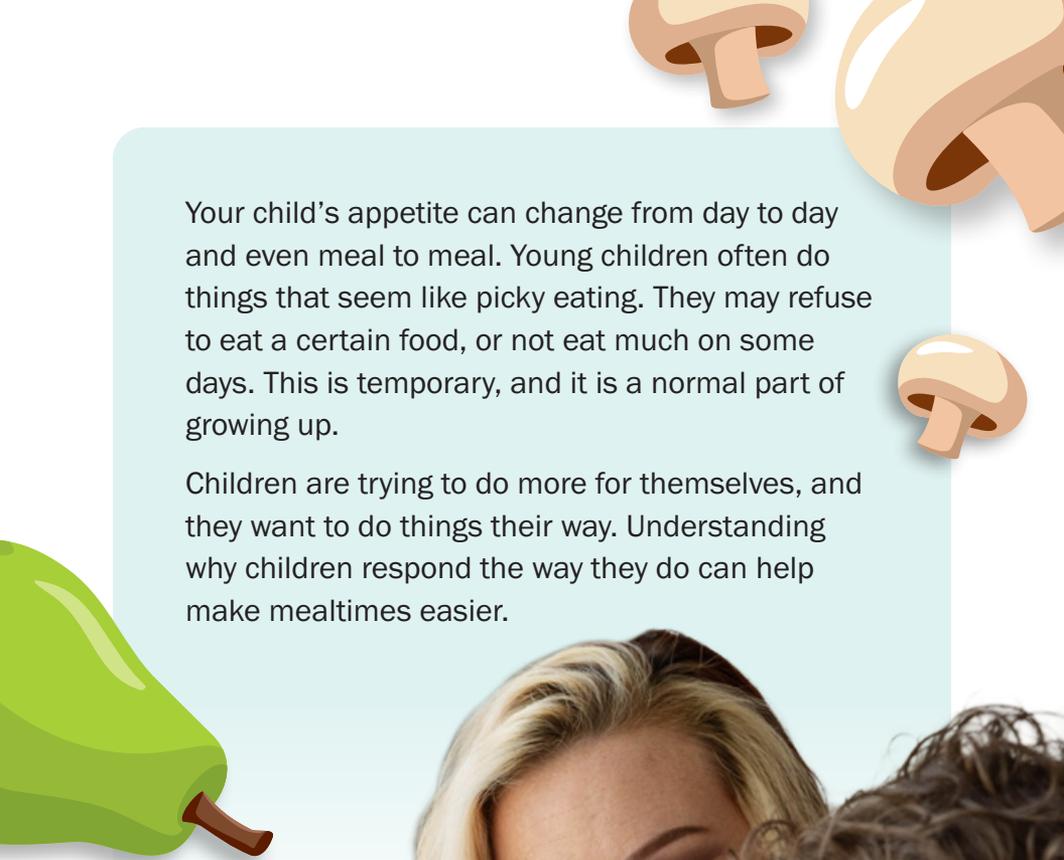




Picky Eating

What you and your child can do!





Your child's appetite can change from day to day and even meal to meal. Young children often do things that seem like picky eating. They may refuse to eat a certain food, or not eat much on some days. This is temporary, and it is a normal part of growing up.

Children are trying to do more for themselves, and they want to do things their way. Understanding why children respond the way they do can help make mealtimes easier.





What can I do when my child will not eat?

- Continue to provide healthy foods.
- Do not make it a big deal and try not to worry. Most children get the nutrients they need over the course of a week.
- Offer new foods with foods your child likes.
- Decide what foods you want to offer and when your child eats.
- Let your child decide how much to eat, even if they decide to eat very little or not at all.



How do I make mealtimes less stressful?

Things you can do:

- Sit down and eat meals with your child whenever possible. Children usually eat better when eating with someone.
- Try to keep mealtimes calm. Your child will eat better without a lot of distractions.
- Set an example. Eat healthy foods yourself!
- Use a simple mealtime routine that works for you and your family. Children like routines. If you change your routine, it will take time for your child to adjust. Be consistent with your new routine.
- Try not to give food as a reward very often. Rewarding with sweets may cause your child to prefer those foods.



New Mealtime Routine

1 Child helps make dinner, helping prepare at least one thing they like, and one new thing

2 Child helps set table

3 Parent sits down with child at table

4 Child chooses foods and serves self with parent help

5 Parent serves small amount of milk, about 4 to 6 oz

6 Parent tries new food and encourages child to try or taste

7 Parent talks about new food with child

8 Parent does not make child finish all food



Things your child can do:

- Children can help. Let them pick out some fruits and veggies at the store. Have them do small jobs to help prepare the meal.
- Children can decide how much to eat. Offer small amounts. Let them stop when they say they are full. Your child may eat very small amounts on some days and larger amounts on other days. This is normal!



- Children can make choices. Offer healthy foods at mealtimes and let them choose which ones to eat and how much. Give your child some control over what they want to eat. Forcing a child to eat foods they do not like can lead to power struggles.
- Children can learn how to serve themselves. Teach them to take small amounts at first. Do not worry about a few spills.



Answers to your questions

Q

My child does not want to eat what I serve. They want something else. What can I do?

- Have at least one food they like at each meal, along with the other foods.
- Offer 2 choices of foods and let them pick one.
- Let your child eat the healthy foods they want. It is normal at this age to sometimes only want to eat one kind of food.
- Encourage your child to help make the meal. Children like to eat foods they help prepare.



Q

How do I get my child to eat new foods?

- Offer a small amount, such as a taste. Do not worry if your child does not eat the new food. Try again another time. You may need to offer it many times before they will eat it.
- Offer new foods at the start of a meal when your child is most hungry.
- Offer 1 new food at a time with foods they like.
- Let your child try all kinds of foods, even the ones you do not like!
- Let your child have time to explore the new food.
- Practice patience. It works better than pressure.





Q

How do I know if my child is eating enough?

- Young kids are smart eaters. They eat when they are hungry and they stop when they are full. Watch for their hunger and fullness cues.
- It is normal for kids to eat less after their first year. They are not growing as fast.
- Your child eats several meals and snacks throughout the day. Look at the total day.
- Your health care provider is a good person to ask, if you are worried about your child's growth and development.

Q

Should I be worried that my child does not want to eat sometimes?

- Do not worry if they skip a meal sometimes. They will make up for it later.
- Put the food away until the next meal or snack. Aim to offer meals and snacks about every 2 to 3 hours.
- Make sure they do not fill up on milk, juice, or sweet drinks between meals. Offer water in a cup when they are thirsty. Have them drink only from a cup now, not a bottle.





Q

How can I get my child to eat more vegetables?

- Offer a choice. “Would you like broccoli or carrots?” This might lead to more willingness to try a new food.
- Continue to offer vegetables along with foods your child likes. It may take up to 15 tries before your child will accept a new food. Children learn by watching you, so eat vegetables in front of them and talk about how good they taste.
- Do not force your child to eat their vegetables. If you do, they may end up not liking vegetables.
- Offer fruits. They have many of the same nutrients as vegetables. Your child may prefer eating fruits.
- Add a dip. Kids love to dip! Serve broccoli, carrots, and other vegetables with low-fat dips or sauces, like yogurt, melted cheese, or avocado. Add vegetables to dishes like spaghetti, casseroles, and soups.
- Try making smoothies or vegetable juices with your child.
- Add fruits or vegetables to breads, cereal, yogurt, or salads.





Q

How much protein does my child need? They do not eat much meat.

- Protein foods are important, but many foods besides meat contain protein. These foods include:
 - » Cow's milk, soy milk
 - » Cheese
 - » Tofu
 - » Cooked dry beans, canned beans, lentils
 - » Nuts and nut butters (choking hazard for children younger than 2 years old)
 - » Eggs
 - » Yogurt
- Some children prefer ground or stewed meat or meat softened with broth.



Q

My child likes to snack all day. Is this okay as long as the snacks are healthy?

- Aim for regular, sit-down meal and snack times. Children need some snacks because their stomachs are small and cannot hold very much food at one time. If your child does not eat at mealtime, let them know they will need to wait until the next snack time.
- Offer healthy foods at snack time. Avoid snacks like candy, soda, and chips.
- Try to offer water between meals. Other drinks like milk or juice may fill up your child and keep them from being hungry at meal and snack times.





Q

Before my baby turned 2 they ate really well. Now I am worried because some days they do not seem to want to eat much at all.

- During their first year, babies grow faster than at any other time in life. After the first year, growth starts to slow down and so does the amount your child will eat.
- If you have concerns that your child is not gaining enough weight, talk to your WIC dietitian or health care provider.
- Sometimes children are drinking too much milk or juice and do not have room for other food. Aim for no more than 16 to 20 ounces of milk and, if desired, 6 ounces of juice in one day.



Q

My child only wants cereal. How do I get them to eat more variety?

- Relax. This is called a “food jag” and it will not last forever.
- Offer healthy foods at mealtime, and make sure at least one of the foods is something your child likes. This could be any healthy food, but not sweet foods like candy or dessert.
- Set a good example by eating a variety of healthy foods yourself. Your child will eventually begin to try more foods.
- Try not to give your child foods other than what you have offered at mealtime. If you cook a special meal just for them, it may encourage picky eating. If they refuse to eat the meal you serve, do not worry, just let them wait for the next snack time.



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