

Top 13 Ways to Break Out of the Picky Eating Rut

Devon Gere, Occupational Therapist

1. Give up the power struggle. You are in charge of what, where, and when they eat. The child is then in charge of if they eat and, if so, how much. The more you push, the more they push back.

2. Set a goal to try to sit down as a family to eat a certain number of times a week. Children are often more likely to try something if others are eating it.

3. NO short order cooking/special meals/alternatives.

4. Present three foods: one the child likes, one they tolerate, and one that's new or has been challenging before. Do not overwhelm the child with a lot of the challenge food on their plate

5. Gradually introduce new foods by slightly changing one that they will already eat. Try to change only one of the following: taste, temperature, texture, or color/presentation. For example, progress from applesauce to strawberry flavored applesauce, applesauce from a cup vs. a pouch, cold, or chunky applesauce. Do not try changing more than one variable at a time.

6. Ease into a new food by using the senses: begin by looking at it -> smell it -> touch it to lips -> taste it -> try a bite -> eat it. Accept that it's unlikely this entire process will happen in a single meal.



7. Avoid judgement-based labels (ex. 'good', 'bad', 'junk', 'healthy'). Food is food. Some may do more for the body than others, but none are inherently 'bad' or 'wrong.'

8. Discourage snacking in between set eating times (i.e. every 2-3 hours).

9. Young children tend not to starve themselves. It is typically ok if they decide to skip a meal.

10. Give vitamins to children 2+ years after speaking with a physician. Consider Flintstones' Complete Multi-vitamin Crunchy or similar complete multi-vitamins. Check the label.

11. As much as feasible, try to avoid distractions such as TV shows or tablets. While easier short term, it can make becoming comfortable with food overall extra challenging.

12. Set firm guidelines about expectations such as staying at the table until the rest of the family finishes if your child tends to claim they are done eating so that they can get back to playing sooner.

13. Try to relax and have fun! Make mealtime silly or exciting. Examples can include incorporating favorite toys or themes, presenting food in different containers (i.e. muffin tin or ice cube tray).