

SUPPORTING YOUR PICKY EATER

Common Reasons for
Picky Eating: Tips and
Tricks



FIREFLY Complex Feeding and
Swallowing Clinic

What Is Picky Eating?

"...Unwillingness to eat familiar foods or try new foods, severe enough to interfere with daily routines to an extent that is problematic to the parent, child, or parent-child relationship" (Taylor et al., 2015)

Picky eating might involve: Mealtime battles, stress around food, worry about nutrition/health/growth

Picky eating is **NOT** uncommon!!!

Language is Important

We want to ensure all foods are NEUTRAL. This means removing conversation about "good" or "bad" foods, or foods a child "likes" or "doesn't like"

INSTEAD OF

- "I don't like"
- "They are a picky eater"
- "That is a good/bad food"

TRY SAYING

- "I'm learning to like"
- "They are learning to be around new foods"
- Talk about the role of the food in our body

Low Appetite

Sometimes, a child may not be hungry, or they may just simply not be interested in food.

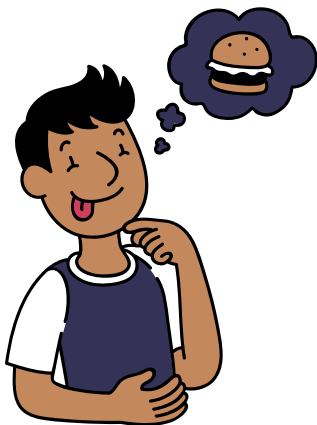
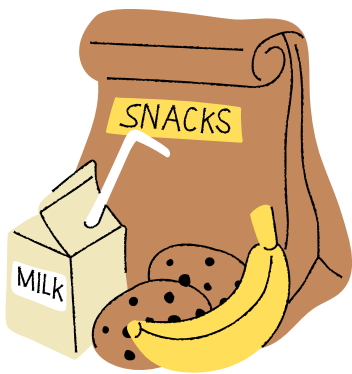
Why Might This Be?

If a child snacks too much throughout the day, or drinks too much milk, they may not be hungry when it is time for meals.

Sometimes, a child's medical condition or medication can limit how hungry they feel.

If a child feels stressed at mealtime, they may not feel hungry.

Some kids may have difficulty interpreting their body cues and might not notice when they are hungry or full.



What Can We Do?

Keep an eye on your child's snacking habits

Ask your doctor how your child's medication may impact their appetite.

Talk to your doctor about whether a test to rule out nutrition-related deficiencies may be appropriate. Don't be afraid to ask questions or request bloodwork.

Talk to an occupational therapist if your child is struggling with hunger cues.

Anxiety/Fear

Some children may feel anxious or scared around certain foods (whether they have seen the food before or not!)

Why Might This Be?

Anxiety/fear about some foods is common for young children!

As children become more independent, they begin to explore their food and may become sensitive to small details of the food

What Can We Do?

Remove all pressures around food; remain neutral.

Give your child a safe and comfortable way to "remove" foods they don't like, or to experiment with new foods (i.e. napkin technique, tasting forks/spoons).

Remove these pressures!



When Little Kids Spit Out Food: The Napkin Strategy

Problem: My kid spits out food onto his plate. GROSS!
Solution: Teach him HOW & WHERE to put it.

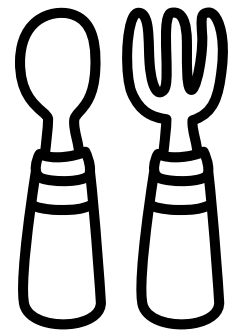
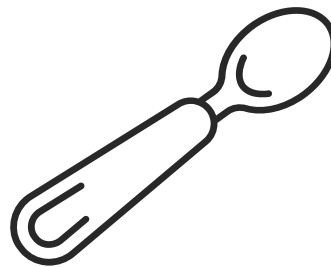
How:
Napkins stay on our laps until we need them.
Hold with both hands against lips.
Push the food into the napkin, don't spit.
Fold napkin over food.

Where it goes next:
Too wet? Hand under table to parent.
Dry & folded? Back on the lap beneath the table.

How does this reduce spitting?
It removes the visual cue (the plate) to spit.
It takes a few more seconds of control & kids will often swallow instead.

✓ **Provide water with a thin straw to encourage washing down the chewed food.**

Feeding Kids at MelaniePotock.com



MEALTIME PRESSURE

- You need to at least take one bite of everything (**forcing**)
- Finish your food like your sister (**shaming**)
- If you eat, you can have a cookie (**bribing**)
- Hovering and counting bites
- You're so picky (**labeling**)
- Good job, you ate your broccoli (**praising**)
- Since you didn't eat your broccoli, we're not going to the playground (**punishing**)

Sensory Differences

Sensation can also impact a child's willingness to try certain foods.

Why Might This Be?

Eating is a complex sensory experience! All of us process sensory information differently.

What Can We Do?

Implement a Pre-Meal Routine

1. Get Ready
2. **Sensory Prep Activity**
3. Transition to Kitchen
4. Wash and Dry Hands
5. Transition to Table
6. All Sit at Pre-Set Table



psy.ox.ac.uk/news/read-our-blogs/celebrating-sensory-processing-with-sensory-street

Sensory Prep Activities:

- Pushing, Pulling
- Jumping, Climbing,

Consider Your Child's Positioning While Eating



The Best Seat

- 90 Degree Angle at hips
- 90 Degree Angle at knees
- 90 Degree Angle at Ankles

Mixed Up Roles Around Food

Sometimes, caregivers and children may end up taking each other's mealtime jobs, and this can make meal time difficult.



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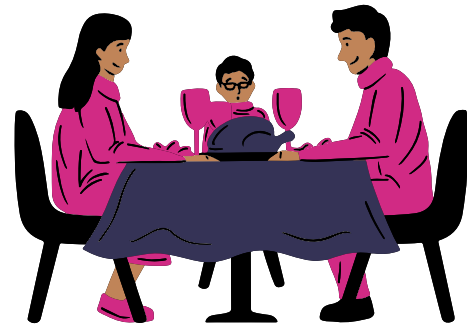
How to Avoid Power Struggles at Meal Time

PARENT'S JOB: What, When, Where

You are in charge of what food is offered, the time it is served, and where eating happens.

CHILD'S JOB: Whether, How Much

Your child is in charge of how much they eat of what you offer - or whether they eat at all.

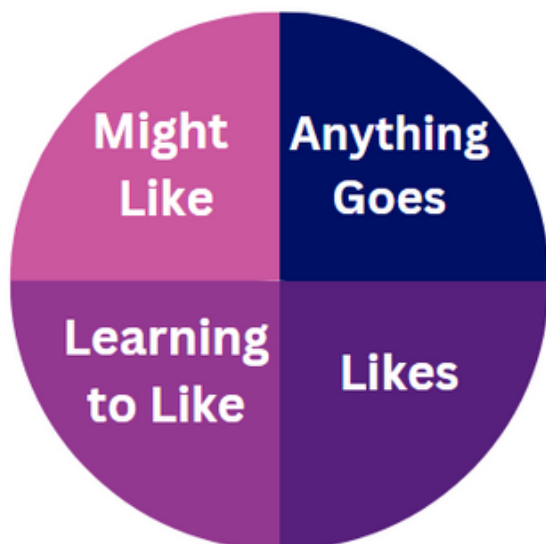


drbeckyatgoodinside This is so important. Feeding our kids can cause so much internal and external conflict. The first thing that needs to be addressed with food-stress in families is this question: What roles and responsibilities is each member of the family taking on?

It's critical to the development of healthy eating patterns (and to self-regulation, self-confidence, consent, and so much more) that everyone does their job and only their job.

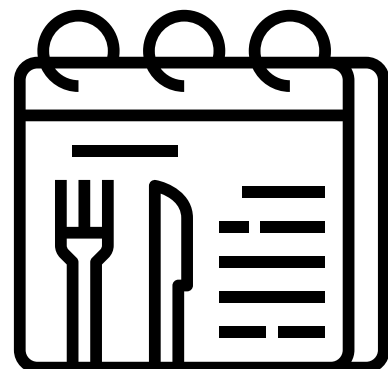
What Can We Do?

M.A.L.L Meals



Make a Mealtime Schedule

Including: Eating Together (When Able) and Eating Screen-Free



Don't Forget to Celebrate the Wins!

Remember: A child trying a new food is NOT the only possible "win"!

Any Exposure to Foods Can be Considered a Win

- Playing with food
- Exploring sensory components of food
- Going to the grocery store
- Visiting a neighbour's garden





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Contact Us



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