

Picky Eating in Young Children

Your toddler or preschooler may not want to eat a variety of foods, try new foods, or eat a certain food due to its texture. This is referred to as “picky eating.” It is a normal behavior for toddlers 12 to 24 months as they explore new foods and it is also typical for preschoolers ages 2 to 5 years as they grow up and become more independent. If a child who is a picky eater is growing as the health care provider suggests, he or she is most likely eating enough to be healthy. If you have concerns about your child’s growth or eating behavior, talk to your child’s health care provider.



Remember, the parent or caregiver offers healthy meals and snacks. The child decides whether to eat and how much to eat.

What should you do if your child is a picky eater?

Offer different foods from all five food groups each day. Try to balance the amounts of food your child eats over a few days or a week. Your child may not eat the exact amounts suggested every day. Encourage your child to choose from a variety of foods.

Young children can easily fill up on beverages. Offer water if your child is thirsty in between meals.

Let your child help with meals and food shopping. Young children can rinse fruits and vegetables, tear lettuce, or stir ingredients. Children get excited about tasting items when they have been involved in the preparation. Also, let your child select a healthy food at the grocery store.

Eat meals together. Serve foods in small portions at scheduled meals and snacks. Do not prepare a second meal when the child does not like the first meal that was prepared. Let your child feed himself or herself. Turn off the TV and keep phones away from the table to focus on the family at mealtime.

Serving a new food. Try serving a new food along with a food your child likes. You can eat the new food first to show your child you are excited about trying the new food, and then let your child try it. It may take a child more than 10 times to accept a new food. Stay calm if the child does not want to eat the food or only wants one bite of the food. Wait a few days before trying the new food again. Do not force your child to eat the new food. Here are some examples of how to add new foods:

- Try serving your child’s favorite dip or sauce with a new fruit or vegetable.
- Blend vegetables, such as sweet peppers, spinach, and broccoli, into pasta sauces.
- Mix beans into taco meat.
- Add mashed butternut squash into macaroni and cheese.
- Layer fruit, yogurt, and cereal in a bowl.

Be creative with food presentation. Use cookie cutters to cut new foods into fun shapes. Make pictures with the foods on your child’s plate. Rename your foods to tell a fun and interactive story.

Don’t bribe or offer sweets or desserts as a reward. Making sweets or desserts a “prize” sends a message that they are better than other foods being offered. Avoid having a dessert every day of the week, and instead have it only once or twice per week.

WIC has nutrition and cooking information on the Internet!

Go to WIChealth.org. Sign up and complete your profile using the **Family ID** on your WIC Verification of Certification card. Click **Begin** and then choose a lesson. There are a wide variety of lesson topics. Also see **Health eKitchen** for new recipes.

This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

Florida Department of Health
WIC Program
FloridaWIC.org



8/22