

Picky Eaters

If you're having trouble with a picky eater, the following tips may help make meals more enjoyable for the whole family.

Be a good role model.

This is the most important tip of all for parents because studies have shown that children learn eating and exercise habits from their parents.

Offer a healthy variety of foods.

Even the choosiest children manage to eat a balanced diet when they are given healthy choices. Offer vegetables, fruits, whole grain breads and pasta, low-fat milk and low-fat protein sources every day.



Stick to your menu.

Encourage your child to eat small amounts of everything offered at mealtime. A tablespoon of each item per year of age is a good rule of thumb. If your child rejects a meal, don't make a big deal about it, but don't make something else.

Avoid junk food.

Keeping junk food and sweetened beverages out of the house will go a long way toward improving the family diet and avoiding unhealthy snacking.

Let the child help.

Children are more likely to eat food they help prepare. Younger children also like food that looks fun, like pancakes or sandwiches cut into shapes with cookie cutters. Consider growing your own tomatoes, lettuce, blueberries, strawberries and other fruits and vegetables.



Don't let the dinner table be a battleground.

Avoid arguments about food or demanding that your child clean his plate. Keeping the dinner table a pleasant place will teach your child to associate eating with positive feelings. Prompt discussion with conversation starters like, "Let's all say what part of the day was our favorite."

Serve regular meals and healthy snacks.

Most children need three meals and one to two snacks a day. Introduce new foods in small amounts and one at a time.



Let your child feed herself.

This is very important, even if it is messy. For infants and toddlers, use large bibs and plastic cups, bowls and spoons that are easy to wash and won't break if they hit the floor.

Limit liquids before mealtime.

It doesn't take much to fill a small child's stomach. Too many liquids before a meal can make her feel full and unable to eat much. Children should be weaned from a bottle to a cup by 12 or 13 months. Drinking too much will reduce your child's appetite for other foods.

To be sure your child is getting the proper nourishment, look at the whole week's intake.

Evaluate the diet by the week instead of the day. For instance, your child may have a day when he eats only bread. On another day, he may crave fruit or milk. It's all right to indulge him as long as the diet balances out by the end of the week.

For more information on nutrition for children, go to CHKD.org/Nutrition.

Your child's pediatrician should be your primary source of advice about your child's health.