

Feeding Your 6-12 year Old Picky Eater

We all want the best for our children and that includes good eating habits. It can be frustrating or worrisome when children are fussy or picky eaters. Your child may refuse to eat part or all of the family meal or only want certain food for school lunches.

If mealtimes are a struggle, following these tips will help your child develop better eating habits. If you still have concerns or questions, speak to a dietitian or your child's health care provider.

Sharing the responsibility

Parents and children have different jobs in feeding. Follow this advice to help your child learn to eat a variety of foods.

The parent's/caregiver's job is to decide:

- | What food and drinks are offered. Make one family meal, not separate meals. When you offer and eat a variety of healthy choices", your child will learn to eat these foods too. Plan a healthy diet using Canada's Food Guide.
- | When food is offered. When children eat at set times they are more likely to come to the table hungry and will be more likely to try new foods.
- | Where food is offered. Children will eat healthier when you eat together at the table, without distractions.

Your child's job is to decide:

- | If and how much to eat from the food and drinks you have served. Trust that your child knows when he is hungry or full.



Steps you can take

1. Eat together at the table as often as possible. Your child will eat better, learn table manners and stay at a healthier weight. You are an important role model for healthy eating.

2. Let your child see you making healthy choices. Your child will eat better and be more willing to try new foods if she sees others at the table eating the same foods. In time, your child will do the same.
3. Keep mealtimes pleasant. A relaxed child will eat better than an upset child.
4. Offer 3 meals and 2-3 snacks at regular times, each day. Offer only water between meals and snacks. This will help your child come to the table hungry. Even a little milk, juice or few crackers can spoil your child's appetite.
5. Turn the TV off. Research shows that you and your child will eat better without the TV on. Other distractions that make it hard to focus on eating are reading, phones, radio, toys, games and the computer.
6. Make one meal, not separate meals. Your child will not learn to eat a variety of food if you only serve what your child likes to eat. Always serve one food you know your child will eat (for example, bread, milk, rice, potatoes) so they won't go hungry.
7. Let your child decide if and how much to eat from the healthy choices that you serve. Growth, activity and sickness are a few things that can affect your child's appetite. Trust that your child knows when she is hungry or full. Serve a variety of healthy food on platters and in bowls so your child can serve herself.
8. Avoid pressure, praise, rewards, tricks or punishment. Children do not eat well when they are pressured to eat. Serve new food on different days in small amounts with familiar food. Never force your child to try foods. There may be some foods they truly do not like and that's OK.
9. Try new food on different days in small amounts with familiar food. Never force your child to try foods. There may be some foods they truly do not like, and that's okay. Expect it to take up to 15 tastes before a child will like a new food.
10. Avoid giving your child too much to drink. Drinking too much may leave less room for other healthy foods. Offer 125-250mL (1/2- 1 cup) of low-fat milk or fortified soy beverage at meals or snack times. Limit juice if possible or offer no more than 175mL (3/4 cup) per day. Keep a jug of water on the table. If they are still thirsty they can have water.

11. Grow, pick, cook and shop for food together. Your child can learn to pack a school lunch and give ideas for meal planning as well. Children learn to enjoy a wide variety of foods when they are involved.

Common questions and answers

Dinner is spent arguing about eating and I often make separate meals. What can I do?

- | Make one meal for the family. Don't make a separate meal.
- | Be kind but firm, and follow through with not making separate meals.
- | You decide what food to serve and your child decides if and how much to eat.

Mealtimes will be more enjoyable and your child will learn to eat a variety of food when you both stick to your own "jobs".

Also try to:

- | Offer a balanced meal. Include a variety of healthy foods according to Canada's Food Guide every day. Offer at least one food your child will eat so she won't go hungry.
- | Serve food on platters or in bowls. Let your child serve herself.
- | Resist the urge to comment on what or how much your child eats.
- | If you have dessert, keep it to one small portion. Serve fruit often.
- | After dinner, offer only water until evening snack time. Depending on your child's appetite, offer a small healthy snack as part of the nightly routine. Offer snack even if dinner was refused. This will ensure your child will not go to bed hungry.

How do I know if my school-age child is getting enough?

If your child is growing well, seems healthy and happy he is likely doing fine. When your child grows faster, he will eat more and when he grows slower, he will eat less. There is no need for concern about the odd skipped meal. Contact your child's health care provider if you still have concerns.

Should I give my child a vitamin-mineral supplement?

Most children do not need supplements. Talk to your child's health care provider before offering supplements. Whole foods offer more nutrition than supplements can provide.

My child does not like vegetables. What can I do?

You can influence your child's food choices. Serve and eat vegetables yourself. You are an important role model for your child. You can also:

- | Serve vegetables at each meal without pressure to eat them.
- | Offer vegetables raw, chopped, grated, grilled, baked, mashed or steamed. Offer them plain, with a cheese sauce or with a dip.
- | Try vegetables in stir fries, casseroles, lasagna, fried rice, pita pizzas, muffins, pasta sauces, tacos, stews, soups, salads, wraps and omelettes.
- | Allow your child to spit out a vegetable into a napkin if they don't like it. Offer encouragement for trying a new food.
- | Offer fruits. They provide similar nutrients as vegetables.
- | For better nutrition, serve vegetables and fruit more often than juice. Limit juice to 125 -175 mL (1/2 -3/4 cup) per day so they don't fill up on it.
- | Help your child come to the table hungry and ready to try new foods. Serve only water between regular meal and snack times. Keep your child physically active

My child wants to eat the same thing for lunch over and over again. What should I do?

As long as your child's favourite food is a healthy choice, you can continue to offer this food to your child. Try these tips to increase variety:

- | Offer a variety of healthy foods. Include vegetables and fruit, whole grains and protein foods at each meal and snack.
- | Try different variations of their favourite food. For example, add chicken or carrot pieces to macaroni and cheese, offer milk in cereal, fortified-soy beverage or yogurt if your child does not like to drink milk at meals.

In time, your child will eat different foods.



Notes

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