



Preventing a Picky Eater

As children begin to feed themselves, they are presented with a wider variety of foods. They can decide what to eat, how much to eat and how to eat it. Other new skills like walking and talking, are often developing at the same time. All of these new skills, even eating, take practice. As a parent, you may not think your child is making the right choices at mealtime, but there are ways to encourage healthy eating habits.

Mealtime Basics

- **Don't expect a toddler to eat much at one time.** A toddler's stomach isn't very big—about the size of a small clenched fist.
- **Let your child decide what and how much to eat.** This will teach a child to recognize what it feels like to be hungry or full and to make choices.
- **Offer foods your child likes and slowly introduce new kinds of foods.** Children may need to try a new food 10-15 times before they eat it happily.
- **Be aware of food textures.** Watch your child and see whether he likes crunchy or soft types of foods. When adding a new food, try a little more solid version than your child already likes, for example, moving from apple sauce to thin apple slices or from mashed potatoes to a baked potato.
- **Model the behavior you want to see.** Eat a variety of good foods yourself.
- **Prepare meals together.** Encourage your child to help stir or pour when you are cooking. This increases desire to taste the food.
- **Do not force your child to eat.** Some research has shown this encourages picky eating.
- **Keep mealtime short.** Young children can only handle activities, including eating, for about 10 minutes.
- **Let your child get up when he is finished eating.** It is unrealistic to expect a small child to stay at the table while others are talking and finishing a meal.