

FACT SHEET

Getting your child to eat can be a true adventure! Kids of all ages have a wide variety of reactions and preferences when it comes to trying new foods. No matter what view your little one has towards meal-time, we all want to make sure that our kids get the right amount of nutritious food that will help them grow-up healthy and happy. The goal is to help your child develop a healthy relationship with what they eat from the very start.

The Picky Eater

The Picky Eater will only eat what they want and will challenge you to change them.

If your anxiety level begins to escalate right before meal-time, every time, then you probably have a picky eater. You already expect that what you want them to eat will result in a tantrum or some kind of drama. Many parents chose to allow their picky eater to just eat whatever they want, even if it's that one thing, every time to avoid confrontation. If that's you, you are not a bad parent. In fact, a lot of parents can feel your pain. There may be periods where this is the better temporary choice. But, the problem with this approach is that your child will likely push-back on other areas of your parenting. They are learning that if they give you enough grief about this, then they can get their way. And, they may quickly decide that approach might work when it comes to everything. That can lead to a day filled with drama.

Picky eaters are more likely to end up with nutritional deficiencies.

Firm/Fun Balance

You will probably need to concentrate your efforts on the FIRM most of the time. Be intentional about trying the FUN part for both of your sake. Being consistent in what you do and don't allow should help to make food-time more manageable, over time.

Your child will go thru stages where food-time is somewhere between easy and challenging. They might suddenly decide that they hate that thing they have been eating all along. Or, they may come around to those Brussels Sprouts without any notice. Your child's taste buds and digestive system are developing. This continual change is what's supposed to happen as they grow.

The Easy Eater

If your child is happy with almost anything at any-time, congrats!

FIRM/FUN BALANCE

This eater falls squarely into the fun part a large amount of the time. Your Easy Eater means that you can concentrate on providing healthy choices and setting them up for a great relationship with food throughout life. It also means that you can easily make food fun! This allows meal-time to be another great bonding opportunity. **Children need a variety of food to be nutritionally balanced.**

The Curious Eater

The curious eater is a mix of "I am happy to try that" or "No Way!"

Firm/Fun Balance

Most kids probably fall into this category. Sometimes, food is no issue. They will try what you give them and let you know if they prefer it or not. You can usually give them options on what they eat and that makes life simpler for the whole family. The occasional, hard push-back may come on certain foods, but it's not typically a big battle. Be FIRM when needed and have FUN as often as possible!

The Firm/Fun Food Balance

When your child accepts what, when, and how much you want them to eat, consistently reward that behavior. Verbal praise, hugs, pats, high-fives, and even other food options are examples of appropriate rewards.

The times your child disobeys, gets upset, or refuse to eat require you to turn up the FIRM factor. This could mean speaking firmly, or using other appropriate discipline. Consistency in the type and level of discipline are important.

Never take away food completely as a punishment; that is abuse. Never force your child to finish their plate.

The balancing act between FIRM and FUN is rarely 50/50. It's often a mix of both that changes from day to day. Never take away food completely as a punishment; that is abuse. **Never force your child to finish their plate.**

NUTRITION – Food for Thought

Let's talk briefly about nutrition. Healthy food choices often include a wide variety of vegetables, fruit, and meats, along with dairy and other items according to your specific goals for your child. You may want your child to have a strictly vegetarian lifestyle or you might be great with encouraging healthy portions of meat and seafood. Perhaps, there are also allergy factors to consider. It doesn't really matter which food lifestyle you prefer for your child, as long as you know that they are getting the proper portions, calories, nutrients, and liquids that will give them the best over-all health.

Sure, there may be those temporary periods of time when your kids will only eat chicken nuggets and that's OK. Just make sure to help guide them to other healthier options along the way. It's up to you to reward the behaviors you want repeated.

Remember, at this early stage of child's life they depend completely on you to provide the food and drinks that sustain their life. This gives you a great opportunity to start healthy habits that will last through their growing years and into adult-hood. The best way to inspire your child to make healthy food choices is for the whole family to model what that means. You are their Role-Model when it comes to food, just like you are in all areas of life.

This may mean that it's time to alter your own food choices and set new boundaries for your whole household. Like most things, it's not what we say to our kids that will last. It's what we do. They will likely develop the same food habits that you have in your life. **Eating together 3 times a week reduces the risk of obesity.**

Healthy food habits include: portion size, caloric amounts, low sugar/sweetener intake, a variety of fresh vegetables and fruits, and limiting junk food. Plenty of fresh water is always a key to great health.

Resources:

1. "Are You Making Every Bite Count?" MyPlate, U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2020, www.myplate.gov/.
2. Williams, Glenda, MD, Pediatrician, Interview