

Turning the Tables on Picky Eating

TURNING THE TABLES ON PICKY EATING

How to raise happy, healthy and confident eaters--even the picky ones!

Sarah Remmer, RD

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Turning the Tables on Picky Eating



How to Raise Healthy, Happy and Confident
Eaters (Even the Picky Ones)!

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1

INTRODUCTION



I am so glad that you're here! I created this book because this is my passion—I love helping parents navigate the

tricky world of feeding their kids, and empowering them to raise healthy happy eaters for life.

I have counselled hundreds of people in my nutrition counseling practice over the past 10 years. Some who I've helped recover from disordered eating patterns and even full-blown Eating Disorders. I've also helped hundreds of my clients reverse unhealthy relationships with food, that unfortunately led them down a path of over-eating, unhealthy weight gain and anxiety around eating.

When I became a Mom myself, five years ago, it dawned on me that so much of what I see in my nutrition counselling practice (weight issues, unhealthy food relationship, disordered eating behaviours, body image issues etc.) could be avoided if parents knew how to feed their kids in a healthy way from day one. I'm not talking necessarily about making sure that their kids eat enough vegetables (that's secondary to what I'm referring to). What I mean, is that most parents don't know HOW to feed their kids in order to ensure that they grow to love a wide variety of foods, eat mindfully and intuitively, and develop a long-term healthy relationship with food. This is the core of my passion—teaching parents how to teach their kids to be confident, happy and healthy eaters for life.

Picky eating is inevitable. What matters most though, is how parents handle picky eating phases. There are positive, healthy strategies that can be used (and these are what I will teach you in this e-book), but there are also dysfunctional, quick-fix solutions that well-meaning parents often use, that unfortunately perpetuate the problem. This is usually where I first meet parents at in my practice—their child is a picky eater, and it's only getting

worse with time—it's not getting better. They are desperate for help.

I've taken my knowledge as a Paediatric Registered Dietitian, and couple it with some humour and compassion (because—I'm right there with you!) to bring you "Turning the Tables on Picky Eating", an easy-to-follow, value-packed book for parents of picky eaters.

Enjoy!

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**MY CHILD IS A
PICKY
EATER...SHOULD
I WORRY?!**



As a parent of a picky eater myself, I know what you're going through. My hope is that this e-book helps you breath a sigh of relief, gives you the strategies to end power struggles at meals, and help you to grow healthy and happy eaters.

When to be concerned:

I often hear parents refer to their child as a “picky eater”. This could mean many things, depending on the child and the situation. Sometimes, “picky eating” means that the child is displaying typical eating behaviours that are normal and part of growing and learning about food. These behaviours can be very frustrating for parents and come and go throughout the toddler and early childhood years. These are the picky eating behaviours that I will be addressing in this course. Sometimes, though, a child exhibits chronic eating behaviours that aren't typ-

ical, affect their growth and development, and disrupt family meals in a big way. These are more serious, and parents should seek help from their paediatrician, who can refer them to a paediatric Dietitian and/or feeding therapist who can help. This is EXTREME picky eating, and although I'll talk a little bit more about it in future lessons, extreme forms of picky eating are, for the most part, beyond the scope of this course.

What's important for all parents to realize is that typical picky eating can easily escalate into extreme picky eating if handled in a dysfunctional way (which unfortunately happens often with the most well-meaning parents). This is why I've created this e-book—to arm parents with helpful, practical, and effective strategies to help them deal with typical picky eating behaviours in a loving and healthy way. And to provide guidance on how to grow healthy, mindful and confident eaters.

In this chapter, I'll outline typical picky eating as seen in toddlers and young children, and give you strategies on how to deal with them. I know what you're going through and want you to know that it's normal, it's not your fault, and with patience and the right tools and strategies (which I will give you), it will pass.

What is typical picky eating?



Let's face it, we as adults enjoy certain foods over others, and maybe even avoid a few because we just don't like them. Imagine being presented with an unfamiliar food—let's say a cooked insect—and how you may feel and react when you first taste it (or choose not to)? This is how kids feel with every new or unfamiliar food that's offered. The term “picky eater” describes a child who rejects several foods, only enjoys a short list of foods, or has an irregular and erratic appetite. These are all pretty normal typical picky eating behaviours, and if dealt with in a positive and productive way, last for a short period of time—days, or weeks—and pass eventually.

When does picky eating start?

Feeding children from six months to 24 months is often referred to as “**the honeymoon stage of feeding**” because babies and young toddlers tend to accept foods well. They experiment with and taste most foods you put on

their trays or offer by spoon, and happily—albeit messily—gobble up a wide variety of nutritious foods. This is why picky eating rarely occurs during this stage. Instead, it often surfaces in the older-toddler or preschool years.

Although babies and young toddlers usually accept new foods without much fuss, somewhere between 24 and 36 months (depending on the child), toddlers start to realize and assert their independence, taking control of whatever they can, including eating and food. This is where the fun begins (wink wink).



After the age of two, growth starts to slow and stabilize, and toddlers come out of their “critical nutrition period,” which means that their food intake and their appetite diminishes. Combined with their newly discovered independence, this can easily translate into mealtime battles. We can relax as parents however, because most of the time, our kids will get what they need over the period of a week, even though it seems as though they eat next to nothing on certain days.

Throughout the course of a day, you may worry that your child isn't meeting his nutritional requirements, but I want to assure you that over the course of a week, he is likely eating a more balanced diet than you think.

It would be unusual if your child wasn't a picky eater to some extent. Try not to obsess or stress about it (I know, it's hard!!) Most picky eaters grow to accept and enjoy a variety of foods.

Control struggles between a parent and a toddler are normal—a toddler loves watching a parent panic or become desperate when he refuses to eat something that's been served. After all, he's getting a reaction! From your perspective, your previously stellar eater is now rejecting many foods, which is discouraging. Toddlers often turn their noses up to foods like meat, vegetables and even (surprisingly) fruit, after they've readily accepted them as babies and young toddlers.

It's normal—don't worry

Every child will go through some sort of “picky eating” stage—it's inevitable. For the most part, these behaviours, although frustrating and worrisome, are completely normal. The trickiest part is learning to handle these stages in a patient, calm and loving way. The way we react to picky eating as parents can either create bigger, more serious eating issues down the road, or can help a child grow her relationship with food in a healthy way.

Kids learn at their own pace. Whether it's riding a bike, tying shoe laces, reading or eating new foods, we as par-

ents need to respect the pace at which our child takes to learn, and practice lots of patience in the process.

The Most Common Challenges That Parents Have

(and how to get through them!):

Here are some examples of frustrating but normal picky eating behaviours exhibited by toddlers or young kids, and advice on how to react (and how NOT to react) in order to grow healthy, confident eaters. Breathe easy knowing that these behaviours are completely normal:

1) He likes it one day, but not the next:

Happily gobbling up your homemade chili one day and then rejecting the leftovers (100% the same food) the next is frustrating and perplexing for parents, but completely normal. Similarly, accepting a previously rejected food out of the blue is also normal. Young children are unpredictable when it comes to eating, and as parents it's important that we stay calm and rational, and that we react in a way that will nurture long-term healthy eating habits rather than create bigger issues. There are many possible reasons why a child suddenly rejects a meal or food that he normally accepts. Here are some common reasons:

– **He's simply not hungry:** For whatever reason, your child may not be hungry when a meal or snack is offered—even if it doesn't make sense to you or doesn't

fit into the daily schedule. The tricky part is, respecting our child's appetite as the parent. We often ask our kids to defy their natural hunger and fullness cues by "having 3 bites" or "just one bite" when really, our kids are being intuitive about their eating. When we start trying to control if and how much our kids eat at meals, our kids actually learn NOT to trust their own hunger and eat according to external cues. It's important to set boundaries around timing of meals and snacks so that eating isn't a free-for-all, and it's just as important to let our kids be in charge of how much they eat at these times. In saying this, it's also important to let your child know that they kitchen will close after the meal, and that there will be no more food offered until __ time.

– **He's too distracted:** Siblings, screens and toys can distract a child so much that they don't eat. It's important to remove screens and toys from the table so that kids can focus on their food and self-regulate their intake. It's also important to set boundaries around behaviour at the table between siblings and friends. At our house, we make sure that our kids have enough space between eachother so they can't poke, push or play during meals.

– **He's bored of it:** My son recently started rejecting his usual oatmeal breakfast that I serve almost every day and that he's loved since he was a baby. Although it broke my heart a little (I never thought he's grow tired of it, and it's such a healthy breakfast!), instead of forcing, bribing or coaxing him into eating it, I put on my creative cap and asked him "what would make the oatmeal yummiier for you?!" In turns out that "red confetti" (a sprinkling of craisins) made all the difference. Asking this simple question might turn a boring food into a yummy food, or sim-

ply adding more variety to meals and snacks can change the game (or change a small part of it). As adults we grow bored and tired of foods from time to time; the difference is that kids are more vocal about it!

2) He spits it out:

This is often seen as a negative or rude reaction, when really it should be positive (haha, hear me out). The other night, I gave my two-year-old daughter kidney beans with her dinner and she first reacted by saying “yucky” when she saw them, but then tried putting it in her mouth and then immediately spat it out. Many parents would assume that this meant she hated it—that she just doesn’t like beans—when really it was a normal reaction to a new and unfamiliar food. The fact that she put it in her mouth was huge—she felt comfortable enough to taste it even though it was completely foreign to her. I smiled and said “that was brave of you to try it!” and didn’t probe her to try it again. I knew that she had just taken the first big step to accepting kidney beans down the road—she just wasn’t ready yet. Give your kids permission to taste a food and then politely spit it out in a napkin if they don’t like it. If they do, make sure that you react positively and praise them for being brave and trying something new. It will increase the chances of them accepting it in the future!

3) He eats next to nothing one day and out-eats adult family members the next:

Your appetite changes from day to day and meal to meal. So does your child’s! If you notice that your child is full or not interested anymore, even after a few bites, don’t

force-feed or pressure him to keep going. He is respecting his hunger and fullness cues and so should you. As frustrating as it is to watch your gourmet meal go to waste, calmly remove the plate, store the food in a container and save it for later. Tomorrow your child may be famished and ask for seconds. Your child may have “hungry days” where he out-eats adult family members, and “full days” where he doesn’t eat much at all. This is all part of normal eating!

My five-year-old son, Ben, often out-eats my husband (who is six feet, two inches tall!), asking for seconds of everything at the table. We try our best not to react, although I am often tempted to say “holy smokes, Ben!” and I’m sure my husband is tempted to give him a high five. We calmly oblige, reminding him to “listen to his tummy”, knowing that he is being intuitive and eating according to his internal hunger cues. I often realize that he had been extra active that day or perhaps that he is going through a growth spurt. It all seems to even out throughout the week, especially when I notice the following day that he only eats a small portion of breakfast.

4) She’ll only eat a select few foods for weeks at a time:

Another common eating issue with toddlers and preschoolers is the “food jag”, whereby a child requests the same food (or two foods) over and over again and refuses to eat anything else. It’s important to know that this stage is very normal and may happen at many times throughout childhood. As parents, we can’t force our children to widen their palates during this finicky stage. And unfortunately, the easiest solution of giving in to

your child's desire for the same food daily will only increase the severity and duration of the food jag.

It's important to resist the urge to play "short-order cook" and cater to his narrow palate. Instead, continue to offer a variety of foods at meals and snacks (once in a while including his beloved food), leaving it up to him whether or not he eats it and how much he eats. The process of learning to accept and like a food can be tedious and tiresome but you will see that it is worth it.

5) He asks for a snack shortly after mealtime:

Although extremely frustrating, the phrase "I'm hungry, can I have a snack?" shortly after a meal is fairly normal. The important thing is how we as parents react to these snack requests and that we do what we can to try to avoid them in the future. I've written about why allowing kids to "graze" throughout the day isn't a good idea many times, and as hard as it is to turn down a snack request (especially when you know that your child actually IS hungry), it's important that we set boundaries and stick with them. Young kids should have eating opportunities every 2-4 hours depending on age—not more frequently than that. Otherwise they won't learn to self-regulate their appetite or intake.

Just the other night, my oldest went to bed hungry because he chose not to eat his dinner and instead held out for a bedtime snack, even when I reminded him repeatedly that the "kitchen will be closed" after dinner and that there would be no snack (there was only an hour and a half before bedtime). I made sure to serve a variety of foods at dinner, most of which he enjoyed, and

reminded him to eat until his “tummy was full”. I did my job as the parent, but my little guy didn’t do his job and instead went to bed feeling hungry. Although it was really hard for me to turn his snack request down and stick to my guns, I was happy I did, because the next day he made sure to eat enough dinner so that he wouldn’t need a snack before bed.

6) She’s all of a sudden rejecting broccoli—a food that she’s always loved:

There is a period of “flavor plasticity” where babies are more likely to accept new flavours (even bitter vegetables!) early on if exposed often, especially in the first few months of starting solids. Babies are more willing to eat them even though they taste them intensely. Although every child is different, this plasticity period is short, so that’s why toddlers often reject bitter flavours, even if they used to love them. And it’s often worse if they’ve never been exposed to those bitter flavours before—there’s more of a chance that they’ll accept bitter foods as a toddler if they’ve been exposed multiple times in infancy. And of course, toddlers and preschoolers have the cognitive ability to react intensely and show displeasure to a taste as compared to infants.

Bitter tastes, in historical times, signaled “toxic” or “unsafe,” so this is one of the reasons why children tend to reject them, even when they previously gobbled them up, and why it’s so important to introduce a variety of veggies when first introducing solids.

The good news is that taste buds continue to change, so veggie rejection won’t last forever. In the meantime,

you can try adding more pleasing flavours to naturally bitter vegetables. Try:

- Broccoli with melted cheddar cheese on top
- Yam chips or fries with a yummy dip
- Kale salad with dried fruit and poppy seed dressing
- lightly steamed or sauteed asparagus with a creamy dip (let your kids use their fingers)

7) She won't sit still at mealtime (and because of this, isn't eating as much)!

This is very normal, especially when it comes to toddlers and young kids. There could be several reasons why your little one won't sit still—she hasn't had enough exercise or play before her meal, she's tired or distracted, or she's not comfortable at the table for whatever reason. One of the biggest and most over-looked reasons why kids won't sit still—and therefore often don't eat well—at meals, is because their feet aren't resting on a solid surface. Kristen Yarker, Registered Dietitian write about this over on her blog. She says “The reason is that while eating is a priority for our bodies, there are two priorities that supersede eating: 1) breathing; and, 2) staying upright (i.e. not falling on our heads). When your child's feet aren't resting on something solid, their bodies are required to focus on not falling over. This takes away from the focus on the task of eating. Babies and young children under 3 years of age are still novice eaters and they need to pay full attention to the task of eating. By providing a solid footrest, you're removing a big source of distraction. ”

Kristen suggests using highchairs are adjustable, or cre-

ating a footrest for your child—an inexpensive footstools (usually used at the bathroom sink) work well.

These are just some of the typical picky eating habits that kids have—there are many more that will be mentioned in future lessons. What I want you to know as a parent is that your child is normal and that you're doing a great job. Even as a Dietitian and picky eating expert, I have moments of worry and frustration over my kids' random picky eating tendencies. But I remind myself to look through my “long-term feeding lens” (something we'll talk about soon!) and react in a healthy and calm way.

Top Take-Aways :

- 1. Picky eating can happen at any time, but typically starts after the “honeymoon feeding phase”, around the two-years-old. It can go in waves from there up until about the age six. However, picky eating phases can creep in at any age. The most important thing is that you know how to deal with it in a healthy way so that it doesn't amount to a larger more worrisome problem down the road (that's why you're here!).**
- 2. Know that if your child is exhibiting picky eating behaviours such as suddenly rejecting previously loved foods, hardly eating anything at a meal and then asking for a snack 10 minutes later, or is going through a “food jag” (only wanting to eat a select few foods for a period of time), he or she is**

completely normal and you likely don't have to worry.

3. Kids have more taste buds than adults do which means they naturally taste foods more intensely than adults do. This is part of the reason why (when coupled with a new found independence and need for control) they might turn their nose up to certain foods in toddlerhood.

4. It's fairly normal for toddlers and young kids to reject vegetables

5. Short-order cooking (letting your child have a special meal that is different from the rest of the family) will only enable picky eating and prolong "food jags"

Action Steps:

1. If you find that your child is bored of a previously loved food, try asking him "how can we make this food yummier for you?" Make suggestions such as adding a sprinkle of "red confetti" (dried cranberries), adding ketchup or Ranch dressing for a dip, drizzling a bit of maple syrup on top, cutting vegetables a different way or separating foods on his plate.
2. Let your child know that it's ok to put a food in her mouth and politely spit it out if she doesn't want to swallow it. Tasting and spitting out is a good thing—it's one step closer to accepting a new food.
3. If you're finding that your child isn't eating much at a meal, don't coax, pressure, hover over

or bribe your child to eat. Instead, remind your child that the kitchen will be closed after that meal and that there will be no more food until the next morning, or the next meal or snack.

4. Don't make a special meal for your child. This will only enable picky eating behaviours.

Instead, include one or two foods that you know your child will likely eat, and serve the whole family the same meal.

5. Don't give into snack requests right after a meal (or at any random time). Kids are smart—they will hold out for a snack if they know they'll get one, and not eat mealtime foods. Clearly communicate timing of meals and snacks so that your child knows ahead of time that snack requests after a meal won't be met.

6. It's not unusual for toddler to reject vegetables. Don't worry about this, but continue to serve them in a non-pressured way. Try adding cheese, dips, and sauces to make them more palatable. In the meantime, fruits and foods from other food groups contain similar nutrients to vegetables, so know that your child is likely receiving the nutrients that they need over the period of a week.

7. Try putting a footstool under your child's feet at mealtime if you find that he can't sit still and seems restless. This will help to make him feel more secure and steady at the table.



Typical Eating is...

- 🍎 Rejecting foods because of their appearance or texture
- 🍎 Spitting out foods after tasting them
- 🍎 Liking a food one day only to reject it the next
- 🍎 Eating more one day than the next
- 🍎 Eating tiny portions one day and huge portions the next
- 🍎 Going on 'food jags' of only liking a few foods at one time
- 🍎 Becoming hungry soon after a meal
- 🍎 Being restless at mealtime
- 🍎 Needing to try a food up to 20 times (or more) before they accepting it

When to worry...

- 🚩 Child is not growing properly
- 🚩 Child has lost weight or has become malnourished
- 🚩 Child's mood has changed significantly
- 🚩 Family meal dynamics are negatively affected in a drastic way

3

**THE MOST
COMMON
FEEDING
MISTAKE THAT
PARENTS MAKE**



~ **Successful feeding is when your child willingly participates in family meals, enjoys herself and feels safe and confident enough to taste and eat foods of her choosing (that you've provided) in amounts that feel right to her ~**

We know that our kids require certain nutrients for proper growth and development, so when they refuse to eat, turn their noses up to new foods or request the same thing over and over and over again, we start to feel frustrated and defeated. We resort to techniques such as:

Bribing: “If you eat three more bites of broccoli you can have dessert”

Shaming: “Your brother always eats his vegetables, so why can't you?!”

Punishing: “No TV tonight for you because you didn't eat all of your dinner”

Forcing: “You cannot get down from the table until you have had two more bites”

These may act as short-term solutions, but can negatively affect our kids’ eating and nutrition long term. Although these tactics are extremely tempting, especially when you’ve witnessed your little one FINALLY eat a decent portion of his meal as a result, looking through your “short-term feeding lens” (“I just want him to eat his meal!”) isn’t the best strategy and actually sets your child up for failure later on. You are not a bad parent if you have reached the end of your rope and chosen the short term solution—you are actually a good parent. One who wants your child to reap the benefits of good nutrition now.

The biggest mistake that well-meaning parents make when it comes to feeding is trying to control if and how much their child eats. This is actually 100% the child’s responsibility.



Your feeding role vs. your child's eating role:

Parents are ultimately responsible for what kids eat, when kids eat and where kids eat. If you've ever heard of Ellyn Satter's "Division of Responsibility of Feeding", you'll be familiar with this concept. It is your job to provide nutritious, balanced meals and snacks at regular and appropriate intervals, in a designated, distraction-free (most of the time) area, such as the family table. Kids, on the other hand, are responsible for *whether or not they eat* and *how much* they eat. And I

have to tell you, as a parent myself, one of the hardest parts of feeding is letting your child do their job. But once you do, your life will be a whole lot easier. The dinner table will no longer be a battlefield and the pressure will finally be lifted off everyone.

Why is this so important?

To ensure your child relies on internal cues for eating:

At around the age of three, children become more vulnerable to external eating cues, such as mom or dad telling them that they need to have “three more bites” or that they “should stop eating now,” or a television commercial advertising hamburgers from McDonalds. Before this age, kids rely almost exclusively on their intuition when it comes to eating—they eat when they are hungry and stop when they are full.

As parents, we want to nurture intuitive eating by allowing them to choose *if and how much* they eat at a meal or snack, so that they continue to trust their body rather than relying on external and environmental cues. This, in turn, will lead to your child having a healthier relationship with food long-term.

Mealtime power struggles:

When the feeding roles aren't established, power struggles between parents and kids can become a problem. Some parents feel as though their child runs the mealtime show and that they are giving in to their requests just to ensure they eat SOMETHING. These parents feel helpless and at the whim of their child at the dinner table. This leads to mealtime battles, pickier eating behaviours

and general chaos around food and feeding. When the feeding roles are set and clearly and consistently communicated, everyone knows what their job is.

Structure and boundaries:

Mealtimes run a lot more smoothly when both parents and kids know what they are responsible for. When kids know that mom or dad chooses when the eating times are, what is served (even though the kids may have some input) and where it is served, they stop trying to control these things after a while (this might take some time and patience at first). Similarly, parents can breath a sigh of relief knowing that they no longer have to control if and how much their child eats at meals or snacks—this is totally up to the child.

When the roles are reversed

Something that I often see in my private practice is a complete reversal of roles when it comes to feeding. Some frustrated and worried parents try to control whether and how much their child eats at meal and snack times and allow their kids to be in charge of what, when and where they eat.

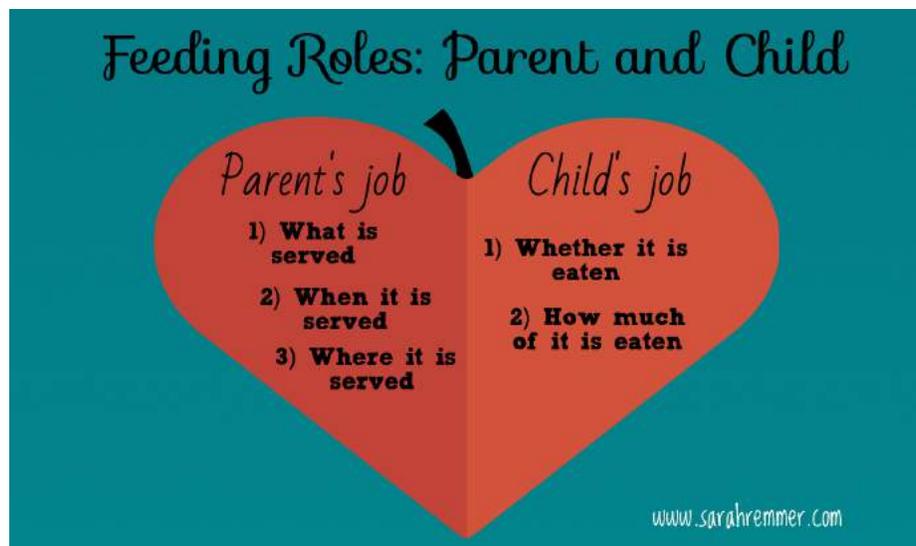
Does this sound familiar?

If it does, you're not alone and you haven't ruined your child. I promise. Remember, you're doing the best you can.

However, this well-intentioned strategy can lead pickier eating habits and major power struggles at the table. Kids are controlling things they shouldn't and vice versa. Once

parents learn about “the feeding roles” and implement boundaries around food, their kids gradually start eating better at meals and the pressure is lifted off of everyone. The best part of my job is getting follow-up e-mails and phone calls from parents telling me about how this strategy completely transformed mealtimes for the better. It really can be life changing.

Mealtime CAN be positive and enjoyable.



So, now that I know what my role is, what do I do in these situations?

One of the most common ways toddlers and preschoolers assert their independence is through eating and food choices. Young kids yearn for some sort of control over their lives, and eating is one way they do this. As mentioned in lesson one, after the age two, growth starts to stabilize and kids come out of their “critical nutrition

period,” which means that their food intake (along with their appetite), slows a bit. They also typically become more particular about food choices and assert their new-found independence quite vocally. Translation: Your previously stellar eater suddenly becomes a picky eater. And this is often when feeding roles get all mixed up.

Here are some common reactions from kids at the dinner table and how to handle them:

“I don’t like that, it’s yucky!”

You may notice that your child refuses to try a new or unfamiliar food by saying “I don’t like that food, it’s yucky” before ever tasting it.

A common reply might be “but you’ve never tried it before—how do you know that you don’t like it? Take a bite.”

The reluctance to try a new or unfamiliar food is called a food neophobia and although proven to be extremely frustrating for most parents, it is a fairly normal eating issue for kids (food neophobias seem to peak around the ages two and six). Some research shows that food neophobias are genetically linked. One study looked at 66 pairs of twins between ages four and seven years old, and found that genes explain over 70 percent of the variation in the tendency to avoid new foods. So if your kid is always the one who shies away from new foods while other kids seem more adventuresome, it could very well be a hereditary trait. Some researchers also believe that food neophobias (especially when it comes to bitter vegetables) stem from hunter-gatherer times, to protect peo-

ple from poisonous or toxic substance (which also tend to be bitter-tasting). Kids judge food by its appearance, so if they know that one green vegetable was bitter tasting (which naturally doesn't appeal to most kids), they may turn their nose up to other green vegetables.

Should I hide vegetable in my child's food then?

A trend that I'm noticing a lot lately is parents "hiding" vegetables in other foods. This sneaky trick may work short-term, but if it is done regularly, it is sending the wrong message to kids, who will eventually catch you and think "it's SO bad that she has to HIDE it?!" When it comes to food neophobias, your job as the parent is to continue re-introducing new or previously rejected healthy foods (up to 15-20 times), without pressure, knowing that your child will eventually learn to accept them in his own time.

One technique that I often use with my son is the "food experiment" where I say "why don't you put a tiny piece of that food in your mouth, and if you like it, you can chew and swallow in and if you don't like it, you can politely spit it out in your napkin." Sometimes he surprises himself (and me) by gobbling it up, and sometimes he cringes and spits it out. Either way, I give him a high five for trying and leave it at that. He's one step closer to eventually accepting it and that's all I can ask for.

If your child refuses to eat it, try this:

Serve a meal family-style: Let your child serve himself sometimes. Instead of plating his food for him every night, let him decide what foods he is going to eat and

what foods he is going to leave. The goal is to let him feel like he has a bit of control and to take the pressure off.

Include a loved food: Always serve at least one food that you know he likes. This will make unfamiliar or unaccepted foods seem a little less “yucky” or scary.

Keep on trying: Keep reintroducing unaccepted foods in different forms. For example, instead of making baked yam like you usually do, make yam “fries” and serve with ketchup to make it more fun.

Model healthy eating: Kids assume that what Mom and Dad do (and eat) is normal and healthy—they are watching you and will mimic actions that you take, such as eating healthy foods.

Modify it to make it yummier: We talked about this in lesson one—ask your child how you can make the food yummier or easier to eat.

Institute the “tester” plate: Have a separate plate for your child, where “yucky” or unfamiliar foods can be placed (separate from his or her regular plate). This plate is meant for exploring foods in safe and fun way such as touching, playing with, stacking, licking or maybe tasting and spitting out foods that your child isn’t ready to eat yet.

“Can I have yogurt and a banana...again?”



Another common eating issue young kids is the “**food jag**”, whereby a child requests the same food (or few foods) over and over again and refuses to eat anything else (we’ll talk more about food jags soon). It’s important to know that this stage is very normal and may happen at times throughout childhood. As parents we cannot force our children to widen their palates during this finicky stage. And unfortunately, the easiest solution (giving in to your child’s desire for the same food day after day) will only increase the severity and duration of the food jag.

Therefore, it’s important to resist the urge to serve only those one or two foods to your child and cater to his narrow palate and instead, continue to offer a variety of foods at meals and snacks (once in a while including his beloved food), leaving it up to him whether or not he eats it and how much he eats. You could say “you don’t have to eat it, but this is what our meal is tonight. We eat lots

of different foods, not just one or two.” Kids may protest and become upset that their favourite food isn’t available (and this can be hard to deal with as the parent) but it’s important that your child know that there are boundaries at mealtime and that you as the parents are ultimately in charge of what is served. Letting your child know that they will have another chance to eat their favourite foods the next day, or later on that same day (whatever you choose) will reassure them that they WILL get another chance to eat it soon. Food jags can be very frustrating, especially if your child seems to hardly touch their meals if they don’t include their favourite one or two foods. As long as you include at least one food at meals—even if it’s just bread—that your child will accept (and let him eat as much as he wants of this food, while gently encouraging him to explore the other foods), and otherwise serve the same meal to the entire family (one that you have chosen), you’re doing your job as the parent. The rest is up to your child.

But, will they be getting enough nutrients??



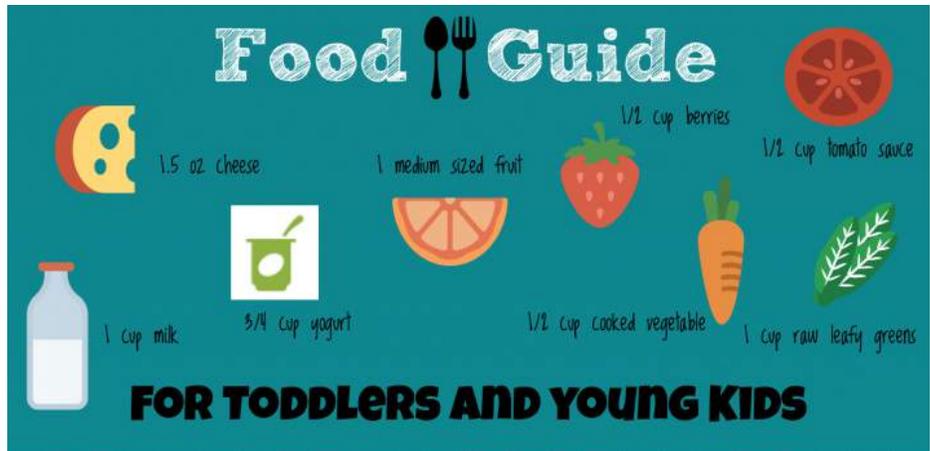
The answer to this is most likely YES. Although it may seem that your child is hardly eating anything at meals, if you were to keep a food diary for your child over the course of one week and hand it over to a paediatric dietitian, she would most likely reassure you that your child is getting what he or she needs nutrition-wise (I know... it may seem crazy). Toddlers and young children don't require a lot of any particular nutritious food to meet their daily nutrient requirements. For example, a two or three-year-old should aim for:

- 1 serving of meats and alternatives per day (this is 2.5 oz meat, poultry or fish total),
- 2 servings of milk and milk alternatives (this would be the same as one cup of milk and 1.5 oz of cheese)
- 4 servings of fruit/vegetables (this would be

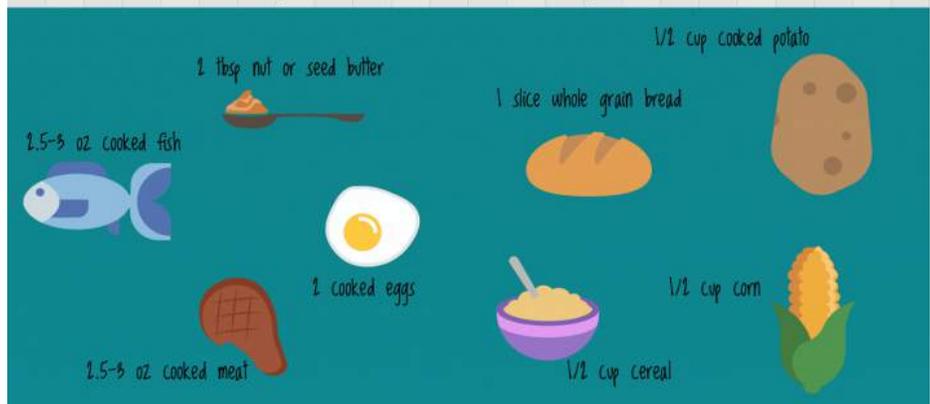
equivalent to 1/2 cup cooked veggies, 1 apple,
1/4 cup of raisins and 1/2 sliced banana)

- 3 grain products (the equivalent to one sandwich worth of bread, and 1/2 cup of cereal).
- 2 tbsp of fat (this could be a combo of butter on bread, oil used for cooking, avocado, and dip for veggies).

And these guidelines are even less for toddlers under 18 months of age. And remember, these are general recommendations. If your child is going through a food jag, he or she may not be meeting these requirements over the course of a week or two and that's ok. The important part is that you not pressure him to eat the foods that he refuses during this time and that you instead, gently encourage him to explore them (this may mean touching, playing with, licking, tasting and spitting out etc.). This will increase the chances of the food jag ending sooner. And remember, your job is to provide these foods for your kids. It's your child's job to decide whether and how much he eats.



Recommended servings per age	18-36 months	4-8 years
Vegetables	2	2 - 2.5
Fruits	2	2 - 2.5
Whole grains	3	4
Milk & alternatives	2	2
Meats & alternatives	1	1
Oils/Fats (tbsp)	2	2



Top Take-Aways

- Some of the most commonly used strategies for dealing with picky eating, such as bribing, coaxing, punishing, rewarding and shaming are

actually counter-productive—they perpetuate the behaviour instead of help the situation. These act as short-term solutions that work in the moment, but create bigger more serious issues later.

- Parents have certain roles when it comes to feeding, and kids have certain roles when it comes to eating. Parents are responsible for the what's, where's and when's of feeding, while kids are responsible for if and how much they eat. These roles are often reversed and this is at the core of why picky eating issues persist and become worse with time.
 - When kids are reluctant or scared to try a new or unfamiliar food, they may have a food neophobia (fear of a new or unfamiliar food). This is normal and not a cause for concern. Research shows food neophobias could be genetically linked and could even stem from historical times when green plants signalled “toxic”. If kids feel pressure to eat these foods, the neophobia will likely persist.
 - “Food jags” are times when a child only wants to eat one or two foods and rejects most other foods. Food jags are normal, but can be really frustrating and worrisome for parents. They usually last for a number of days or weeks, but don't persist long-term.
 - Even though it seems as though your child isn't getting enough from day to day, she is likely meeting his or nutritional requirements over the period of one week.
-

Action Steps:

1. Resist the urge to bribe, force, coax, or pressure your child to eat at meals and snacks–this will only turn her off of those foods that you are pushing even more and prolong picky eating behaviours. Instead, stay true to your role as the parent in the feeding relationship: Offer a nice variety of healthy foods at appropriate intervals throughout the day (every 2-3 hours depending on age) in a distraction-free and appropriate place (the family table is best) and otherwise back off. Let your child do her job of deciding if and how much she will eat.
2. Know that food jags and food neophobias are normal and not cause for concern. The most important thing that you can do as the parent, is continue to offer a variety of foods–some of which you know that your child will accept and some that they might not accept yet–in a non-pressured way.
3. To increase the chances of your child eating more of the healthy foods that you serve, try serving them family-style, where kids get to serve themselves, ask your child how you might make that food yummiier, always serve at least one food that you know your child will accept, and keep on trying–patience is key.

4

**YOUR
SHORT-TERM
FEEDING LENS
VS. YOUR
LONG-TERM
FEEDING LENS**



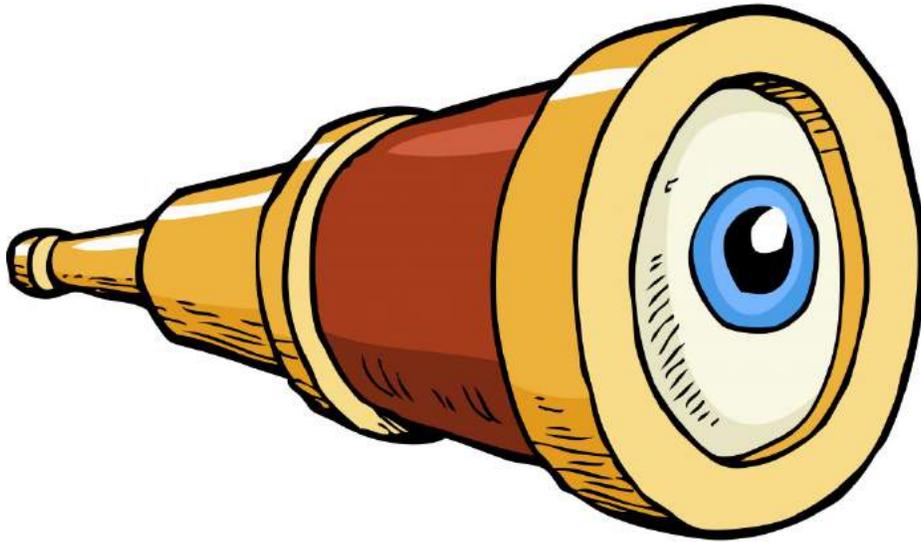
Food can be a powerful tool when it comes to parenting.

It can calm a tantruming child, it can be used to coax a child into behaving a certain way, it can create peace when confrontation arises, and it can distract a child when he's upset.

As the Mom of three, I know how tempting it is to use food as a parenting tool (and I have used it before, trust me!). It is an instantaneous fix. A sigh of relief. **But when we use food—something that is meant for nourishing—to discipline, distract, reward, or bribe, it can have lasting effects on not only our kids' health, but their lifelong relationship with food.**

Which lens do you use when you feed your kids?

Short-term Lens vs. Long-term Lens



As parents, we often put our “short-term lens” on when it comes to feeding, especially with young kids. We’re often in a rush and want our kids to eat something NOW or behave a certain way NOW, so without even thinking about it, we turn to what works—FOOD.

When we’re short-term focused with feeding, we are more tempted to use strategies that are counter-productive for our kids’ eating success in the future.

Although it can be challenging, it’s very important that we learn to put our “long-term feeding lens” on, as to help our children form positive core beliefs about food.

After working with kids and adults in my nutrition counseling practice for over 10 years I’ve learned that the quick-fixes that work so well with young kids, can have

lasting negative effects. I've worked with kids, teens and adults who either have severe picky eating issues, disordered eating patterns or full blown Eating Disorders. What's common among most of these clients is that they've formed negative associations with food at some point.

When food, which is supposed to be a nourishing, positive part of your child's life, is used for things like bribes, distraction or punishment, a negative association might be created. When this happens, the risk of food avoidance (or food addiction) goes up. But, these are extreme examples of what can happen when we use quick-fix solutions to get our kids to eat. Most of the time, frustrating picky eating behaviours persevere and perhaps worsen with these tactics. And these are all things that we're trying to avoid.

Think about your child's long-term eating success as a work in progress and try to keep your eye on the prize: raising a healthy, happy balanced eater who loves food. Raising a healthy eater takes a lot of patience and a lot of time so try not to get discouraged. It's actually a lot more simple than you think.

Remember, your job as the parent is to provide healthy, balanced meals and snacks every two to four hours (depending on age) in a safe and distraction-free place.

The rest is up to your child. For real.



Once parents realize this, they are able to breath a sigh of relief. Mealtimes suddenly become more enjoyable and less stressful. Yes, your child may not eat an ounce of what you've served, but you've done your job and that's all you can do. When your child refuses to eat, try to think of it as an opportunity to talk positively about those foods, model healthy eating yourself, and to encourage exploring the foods in other ways such as touching them or stacking them. As frustrating as this can be (it's no walk in the park- I know), this will bring your child one step closer to trying and accepting those foods in the future.

The goal is not to get your child to eat his broccoli!

The goal is to get him to think about eating the broccoli in the future. To make broccoli seem a little less scary so that he can eventually, maybe, put it in his mouth. That might mean that he watches you and your spouse eat broccoli 20 times before he's ready to touch it. It might mean offering to melt cheese on top or being able to dip it in Ranch dressing. Or maybe it means playing with it by pretending that it's a tree at first. Every encounter with the broccoli should be as positive as possible. Even if it's simply letting it be on his plate (or a tester plate).

Even though we CAN use our authority as parents to get our kids to eat—we can even force them if we want to—this will only discourage them from truly accepting that food and it could even turn them off even more.

Here are 6 common short-term, quick-fix feeding strategies that don't work very well, and what to do instead:

1. Hovering:

Even though we may not think of this as “pressure”, it most definitely is. Imagine if you had someone staring at you, focusing on you and your every bite, talking about you and your lack of eating to other family members, or pushing food closer to you. Think about how you would feel. You would definitely not feel at ease or open to eating more of your meal. You'd feel pressure, negativity, and discomfort, I'm guessing. And this is probably how

your child feels too. Any special focus on your child at the table will make him feel pressured and on the spot. Try to include him as any other family member at the table. He's been provided with a healthy, balanced meal with at least one food that he usually accepts well. He DOES have to sit at the table with the rest of the family because it's polite and it's family time, but he DOESN'T have to eat if he doesn't want to. You can ask him a few questions that might spark his interest in eating a bit more, but beyond that, stop hovering. I know-it's hard!



2. Spoon-feeding your child:

EEK. This one happens all too often. When parents physically spoon-feed a child to get them to eat. My husband has done it on occasion with our two-year-old out of frustration because she is a very slow eater. I kindly and quickly remind him NOT to do it. Here's the thing: If your child is over 9 months old, you should not be spoon-feeding her. Ever. Well, unless both of her arms are broken. But I'm assuming that is not the case for any of you.

Joking aside, this is a really bad habit to get into. And a hard one to break. The goal is to raise a healthy confident eater. We want our kids to feel capable at the table. We want them to grow to be independent eaters, able to choose from the foods provided and how much of each to eat. We also want them to develop the fine-motor skills necessary to eat independently. If we're spoon-feeding them, they will not feel capable, nor develop the skills to feed themselves at the appropriate pace.

If you've fallen into this habit, don't beat yourself up – lots of parents do it. But, it's time to wean your tot or young child off of being fed and encourage self-feeding. Show your child how to properly hold their kid-friendly fork and spoon (and even give them a plastic knife and show them how to cut their food!). It might take them longer to eat at first, but this is ok. Babies as young as eight or nine months can start feeding themselves with utensils. In fact, at six months, they are ready to self-feed soft finger foods.

Fine-motor skills and independence aside, spoon-feeding your child also discourages mindful eating. After all, you are deciding what and how much your child is eating, right? This should be completely up to him or her.

If you're spoon-feeding because you have a slow eater, try setting a timer instead. Kids should need no longer than 30 minutes to eat a meal. Give two to three warnings ("there is 10 minutes left to eat your dinner!"..."there is 5 minutes left"). This will take some time for your child to get used to, but he will learn eventually that mealtimes aren't a two-hour ordeal. If this is happening, he won't have a chance to build up hunger for the next meal or

snack, and he won't know what comfortable fullness feels like either. Setting time limits at meals helps kids learn how to self-regulate.

3. Distracting:

I remember standing in a grocery line recently watching a mom with a preschool-aged boy who had just fallen and scraped his knee in front of me. His mom, trying to console him (and stop the crying), reached into her purse to grab a lollipop. Her son immediately stopped crying and excitedly unwrapped his treat.

We've all been there—our child enters the throes of a tantrum in public or hurts himself and screams/cries at a playground and all of a sudden all eyes are on you and your child and you're desperate to make it stop. You're in survival mode and you've got a treat on hand and voila... problem solved! But at what cost?

Distracting your child with food works short term, but it also hinders your child's ability to work through his negative feelings in a healthy way. It also encourages your child to turn to food as a coping mechanism. As your child grows, instead of working through tough times in a positive way, he may turn to food for comfort or to distract himself. You can see why this might not translate into healthy long-term eating habits I'm sure. Try not to use food as a distraction clutch.

4. Rewarding/Praising with food:

When we reward a child for good behaviour with food ("you were such a good girl at Grandma's house, now you

can have an ice cream cone!), a child will begin to associate food with being “good.”

Most of the time, reward foods are sweet and delicious, therefore, foods that are already “fun” are put on a higher pedestal and can become even more desirable.

By rewarding with food, you could also be creating a “**reward junkie**“. I’m not a parenting expert, but I know that my parenting expert friends would agree that constantly offering a reward for normal “good behaviour” such as playing nicely with another child, sharing toys or treating other adults with respect, your child will begin to expect a reward for every good behaviour. This may become tricky when there is no reward to offer and may decrease your child’s motivation to be well behaved unless a reward is offered in return.

You might also be unintentionally sending the message that you don’t think your child is capable of good behaviour unless a reward is offered. As parents we want to send the message that good behaviour is normal and expected and that our kids are more than capable to provide it—not just when Mom or Dad is there to reward them with a treat.

What more, is that kids who are rewarded with food learn to use food as a comfort tool too. Later in life, this may translate into late night binging after a tough day and then subsequent dietary restriction the next day—I’ve seen this time and time again in my practice. Andrea Nair, my friend and a well-known parenting educator, agrees by saying “instead of looking at food as an enjoyable way to feed hunger, children might start

to associate food with making themselves feel better. These associations can be hard to break later in life.”

When it comes to healthier ways to reward your kids, Andrea Nair says that “the process of using words that inspire a child to cooperate rather than tricking them to comply will grow their problem-solving skills instead of their defenses. With a calm, friendly tone, parents can teach their children to move through their big feelings without involving food.”

What I’ve noticed with my own preschooler, is that saying “*I noticed that you were sharing really well with Nate*” or “*I saw you protecting your baby sister there*” goes much further than rewarding with something like food. It lets him know that I noticed his good behaviour and gives him a confidence boost and sense of pride, which helps to encourage the behaviour again. There is an entire lesson devoted to this idea of praising kids at the table—stay tuned!

5. Bribing:

What is the easiest and fastest way to get your child to do something that you want or behave in a certain way, NOW? By offering some sort of treat food, right?! We’ve all done it. Desperate parents pleading with their children to stop misbehaving by offering a treat food, or by withholding a treat food: “No dessert tonight if...” Or, parents offering up a food reward for future good behaviour: “If you are a good boy, we’ll go for icecream later.” It is most certainly a quick and easy way to get your child to behave a certain way, at least for the short term. And so many well-intentioned parents do it.

So, what's the big deal?

Interfering with your child's natural hunger and fullness cues:

Chances are, a food bribe will be offered when a child is not hungry. However, offering a yummy treat immediately triggers hunger (when you think about something delicious, you automatically start to crave it). This is why you start to salivate when you see an advertisement for a delicious food. There is actually a physiological response that happens inside of our bodies that triggers our blood sugar to drop, making us feel hungry. So no matter what time of day it is, or when your child's last meal or snack was, they will start to crave the desired food that you have offered as a reward or bribe. That leads to mindless eating and dependence on external (instead of internal) cues to eat.

Increasing the desirability of dessert:

If you ask for good behaviour in exchange for a cookie, you will be increasing the desirability or perceived value of that cookie, putting it on a pedestal. At the same time, healthier foods such as vegetables will be perceived as less appealing. If we put foods (healthy foods and not-so-healthy foods) on a more level playing field—offering treats randomly and with no attachment to a desired behaviour—these foods will not seem quite as wonderful.

Health concerns:

Constantly offering your child foods that are high in sugar and saturated fat (which most bribing foods are) will not only displace healthier more nutrient-dense foods in their diet, but also contribute to poor dental health, overweight/obesity, and a whole host of long term

health problems. Offering treat foods once in a while when your child eats an otherwise balanced diet is perfectly fine and shouldn't lead to health problems.

I would be lying to you if I said that I've never bribed my child with some sort of food (ahem...potty training) and sometimes it comes down to survival, which may mean offering a box of raisins or a gummy bear once in a while as a reward. Normal. Where it becomes unhealthy is when food bribing is happening consistently; daily or even weekly.



6. Shaming:

Kids, especially when they reach preschool age, may start to ask for certain foods over others (treats over healthier foods) and may even start to sneak foods if they feel as though they shouldn't be having them. More commonly, they may eat only one type of food (perhaps starchy carbohydrates) at a meal and leave the rest. If this sounds familiar, you may have unintentionally shamed your

child by saying something like “*your brother eats his broccoli, why don’t you?*” or “*I’m disappointed in you for leaving all of the vegetables in your plate*” or “*you are not allowed to have that cookie! I’ve told you a million times—no sneaking food!!*” or “*I wasn’t happy with your eating tonight—you need to try harder tomorrow*”.

Making your child feel ashamed for eating certain foods over others, sneaking food or not eating a certain food will not only hurt his self-esteem, but it will also create negative associations with food and perhaps encourage long-term picky eating, binge eating or other forms of disordered eating.

It’s important to know that food jags, sneaking food, and avoiding certain foods is COMPLETELY normal. These are food phases that will pass, and it’s important that we as parents support our kids through them without damaging their relationship with food. Remember to focus on what your child IS doing that is positive at mealtimes. Notice the small strides that he’s taking when it comes to exploring new foods or being more open to previously rejected foods. This will encourage more of that behaviour—it will make it feel capable of continuing the behaviours and improving upon them. Simply noticing these things (saying “I’ve really been noticing that you’ve been brave lately and have been trying some new foods”), goes a really long way.

Top Take-Aways:

- Unfortunately, negative associations with food can easily be formed in toddler- and childhood

if quick-fix solutions such as bribing, forcing, shaming or coaxing are used regularly at the dinner table. When negative associations are created, this can lead to more serious picky eating issues and even affect a child's long-term relationship with food in an unhealthy way.

- Raising a healthy eater takes a lot of patience and a lot of time so try not to get discouraged. Remember, your job as the parent is to provide healthy, balanced meals and snacks every two to four hours (depending on age) in a safe and distraction-free place. The rest is up to your child.
- The goal is not to get your child to eat his broccoli! The goal is to get him to think about eating the broccoli in the future. To make broccoli seem a little less scary so that he can eventually, maybe, put it in his mouth. Every encounter with the broccoli should be as positive as possible. Even if it's simply letting it be on his plate (or a tester plate)
- Some common quick-fix strategies to get your child to eat are: hovering over, spoon-feeding, bribing, convincing, forcing or shaming. These may work really well in the moment, but will not help you in the long run.

Action Steps:

1. Instead of hovering over your child at the table to ensure he's eating enough (which makes him feel pressured), take the attention off of the food (and your child's eating), and instead focus

on family time, eating your own meal and gently encouraging your child to explore his food, even if that means not tasting it at first.

2. Make meals a positive, pressure-free experience for everyone by allowing your child to be in charge of whether and how much he eats. As long as you've taken care of the what's, when's and where's of feeding, you've done your job.

3. Do not spoon-feed your toddler or child. Encourage self-feeding so that your child can build her fine-motor skills, and learn to be a confident, independent and mindful eater.

4. Don't reward or praise your child for eating, instead, notice his efforts to try new foods (even if this means allowing it on his plate at first), and celebrate the little tiny milestones and the bravery that your child shows around trying new foods.

5. Try your best not to use food as a distraction when your child is upset or is misbehaving. If done regularly, this could lead to unhealthy coping skills and reliance on food to distract or comfort.

6. Try not to offer food rewards either—this will increase the desirability of “treat” foods and increase the “yuck factor” of healthy foods.

5

**12 REASONS
WHY YOUR
CHILD ISN'T
EATING AT
MEALS**



There's nothing quite like spending time prepping, cooking and serving a meal, only to have your child turn his nose up to it and push his plate away. Ugh, I've been there so many times and know how frustrating it feels. What I've learned though, is not to take it personally (which is hard) and that there are several common reasons why this happens.

Here are the most common reasons why your child is refusing to eat at meals, and what to do about it:

1. She feels pressured:

If a child feels any amount of pressure to eat or senses that you as the parent are anxious at mealtimes, she will likely back off and not eat. Toddlers and young kids sense pressure, even if it's not as direct as "eat your peas!" If you focus too much on what and how much she's eating during a meal, instead of allowing her to simply be another eater at the table (while you focus on your own meal), she will back right off. Perhaps you push food closer to her,

watch her every move, hover over her, continually take uneaten food off of her tray and replace it with new food, talk about her lack of eating, or pick up food and bring it to her mouth without her cueing to do so—these are all forms of indirect pressure.

Let your toddler self-feed and eat at her own pace at meals, provide lots of food variety at meals in manageable amounts, and let her be in charge of whether and how much she eats. Try your best not to hover over your child. I know—it's hard not to when she's hardly touching her food. Sit back and engage in conversations with the whole family, including your child. If you can think about mealtime moreso as family bonding time than “get my kid to eat time”, your child won't feel as pressured and will be more open to trying new or previously rejected foods.

2. He feels like he has no say:

We know from research that kids eat better when they have a hand in helping with shopping, preparing, cooking or serving their meal. That's why it's important to include kids in meal prep—even getting them to mix together ingredients or set the table can help. And even though parents should ultimately be in charge of the “what's” of feeding, kids might feel as though they have no control over what they're fed if parents don't include them in choosing foods once in a while. They may grow bored of what you serve them, or perhaps they don't like the way that their foods are placed on their plate. We know it's important to set healthy boundaries and meet your responsibility of “what, when and where” but it's also ok to let your kids be a part of this, especially when it comes

to the “what’s”. There are a few ways to include your kids in the meal process. And they all have something in common: you’re giving your kids **structured choice**. Structured choice is key when it comes to feeding kids. It gives your kids some say and makes them feel as though they have a bit of control, but it allows you to still ultimately be in control.

Some of these strategies will work better for younger kids and some with older kids.

Shopping: Bring them shopping and ask them what they want to try from each section. Give them 2-3 choices in each section of the grocery store. You could say something like “do you want to try kiwis, cutie oranges or blackberries this week?”. Or if you’re shopping for cereal, you could say “do you want to try cheerios, shreddies or oatmeal squares this week?”

Meal or snack planning: Let your child help with planning out the week’s meals or even just what they’ll have for a snack that afternoon. If meal planning, you could say “on Wednesday, we’re going to have salmon. What would you like to have with it? Rice, quinoa or pasta? And what about veggies... we could have roasted asparagus, caesar salad or raw veggies and dip. Which ones would you like?”

If it’s snack time, you could ask your child “would you like yogurt with a pear or a banana muffin and cheese?” and let them decide.

Preparing: You could say “it’s time to help me make dinner now” and ask your child if they’d like to rinse fruits and veggies, mix ingredients in a bowl or set the table. Let

them decide which would be most fun (or they could do more than one!).

I realize that involving your child in meal planning, preparing and cooking can make the process longer and maybe a bit more frustrating. But the benefits are huge and it's worth it. Patience is key.

3. He's bored:

I'm like any parent and get stuck in "food ruts" where I serve the same thing over and over again. Translation: major kid boredom. Here's an example: after my third baby was born last Fall, I felt as though I was in survival mode for a few months (I still do sometimes) and sent my son to school with the same snack pretty much every day. A healthy granola bar, cheese or yogurt and a piece of fruit. Yep, the same thing over and over again. I was basically sleep walking in the morning when I was getting my two older kids ready for the day, so I felt like it was a win that I was even remembering to pack my son's snack! Anyways, he started coming home with most of his snack uneaten not just once, but pretty much every day. In my sleep-deprived state, I didn't realize that he could be growing tired of his snack, even though he used to love it. I asked him why he wasn't eating his snack and he said "I don't know, I just don't like it any more". I then asked him if he was bored of it and he replied "yes I'm bored of it". We then came up with a few new and different snack options for him together and I try to rotate through 3 or 4 of them so that he doesn't get bored. We get bored of certain foods and so do our kids. This is usually an easy challenge to overcome.

4. She's simply not hungry:

We now know that toddlers' and kids' appetites can be unpredictable and erratic at the best of times. After the age of two, growth slows and stabilizes which means that toddlers aren't as hungry as they used to be. We've talked about kids having "hungry days" and "full days" and that could mean that one day, your child out-eats everyone at the table, and another day he doesn't eat much at all at his dinner. As long as you're maintaining your feeding roles and staying consistent with mealtime boundaries, your child should be in charge of whether and how much he eats. It is possible that your child is simply not physically hungry when a meal is served (for whatever reason) and that's ok. We need to be able to accept "I'm just not hungry" as an acceptable answer sometimes.

5. She's distracted:

Allowing your kids to watch TV, watch an iPad, or play with toys at the table is a recipe for distraction. Screen distractions can work in two ways (both of which are negative in my mind). When a child is watching a show or playing a game on an iPad while eating, he is focusing most, if not ALL, of his attention on the show he's watching or game he's playing. There is no attention left for eating his meal, let alone listening to his tummy. With a screen in front of them, kids will can easily under or over-eat because they're just not paying attention. Young kids have a hard enough time focusing on their meal with minimal distractions let alone a big shiny moving screen in front of them. The same goes for toys and playing with siblings at the table. Set healthy boundaries by not allowing screens or toys at the table while eating. Seat kids

strategically so that they can't touch each other. Also, put a footstool under your child's chair so that they feel as though their feet are steady and stable (this could potentially be another distraction).



6. Portions are too big:

Some kids are turned off of a meal simply because the portion that they've been served is too large and overwhelming. This was never a problem with my oldest son, but is definitely a problem with my daughter. I used to serve her the same amount that I served my son (this was a mindless habit that I got into), but then after many meal rejections, realized that I was serving her too much. We were wasting food and my daughter was overwhelmed with the portions that I was offering. When I cut her portions down (by more than one half!), she started eating her meals again and sometimes even asked for more. I served her less of everything, but still made sure that she was getting a nice balanced meal. I realized that I am like

this too—if I’m served too large of a portion of any food, I immediately become turned off and don’t eat as much.

7. He’s a “super-taster”:

Kids naturally have more taste buds than adults do, but if your child is a “super taster”, he will have even MORE. Unfortunately, this super power translate into struggles at mealtime. All flavours will be tasted more intensely for your super-tasting child—sweet, savoury, bitter, salty, sour etc. It’s estimated that about 25% of people are super tasters (most of whom are female), but with kids, this can often be mistaken for “picky eating”. Babies are hard-wired to prefer sweet tastes (because sweet signals energy rich and survival) and steer clear of bitter tastes (which historically signal toxic and dangerous). If your child is a super-taster, these taste experiences are magnified and often mean that he or she will have strong likes and dislikes. Bitter flavours seem to be especially icky for these super tasters. This can make fruits and vegetables, which have natural bitter compounds (which are healthy!) less appealing for your little super-taster.

One good thing about being a super-taster is that they don’t crave as many sweet or fatty foods as the rest of us—a little taste goes a long way. Except, unfortunately, with salty flavours. Super-tasters tend to LOVE salty foods because salt tastes mask bitter tastes. If you think your child is a super-taster, talk to him or her about it and explain it in a positive way. Don’t worry—it’s not harmful and doesn’t need to be cause for concern. You do however, want to be aware of it and perhaps experiment by using blander flavours with some of the dishes you make. Also, you’re going to want to be creative with serv-

ing fruits and veggies to ensure that your child meets his or her requirements of vitamins and minerals. Here are some examples:

- Roast veggies to bring out some natural sweetness and bring down the bitter
- Choose naturally sweet veggies such as carrots, sweet potato, sweet peas etc.
- Serve veggies with dips such as ranch dressing, peanut butter, tomato sauce or ketchup
- Add fruit to blander meals like oatmeal or cereal
- If serving dessert, add fruit to it (ie. frozen yogurt with berries).

8. She's sensitive to certain textures:

Sensory processing can play a big role in a child's refusal to eat foods. Basically, if something feels gross in their mouth or on their hands, they aren't going to eat it. The therapeutic term given for this is "tactile defensive". If your child is gagging, squirming, or seeming frightened by the sight, smell, touch, or taste of a particular food, he or she might be tactile defensive. If this is the case, it might be a good idea to seek one-on-one support from a Pediatric Occupational Therapist, because if not addressed, could lead to more extreme forms of picky eating. If you think this is the case for your child, here is a great blog post by paediatric occupational therapist Alisha Grogan of "Your Kids Table" on [working through feeding challenges with your child](#).



9. Too many snacks:

Kids who “graze” between meals often come to the table feeling too full to eat. This is why it is so important to establish structure around snack times. There should be a designated snack time where one or two foods of the parent’s choosing (such as yogurt and fruit or cheese and crackers) are offered, rather than snacking being a random free-for-all in between meals. Toddlers and young kids need to be given the chance to build an appetite for meals, otherwise, they won’t eat much and it will be harder for them to learn self-regulation. This not only disrupts family mealtimes, but can also affect a child’s nutritional intake and overall relationship with food over time.

10. Too tired:

It is very possible that your toddler or young child is simply too tired to eat. After a long day of playing, daycare,

preschool, kindergarten etc. some kids just don't have the energy to bring fork to mouth. If you're finding that your child is fussy, easy to cry, rubbing his or her eyes, or otherwise showing signs of "hitting a wall", that's probably what's happening. In this case, encourage him/her to fill their tummies before bed as best as they can, and remind them that there is no more food until morning. If they don't eat much, know that they'll make up for it at some point the next day or during that week, so there's not too much to worry about.

If you're finding that your child is tired regularly at dinner however, it might mean that they need an afternoon nap (or morning nap—my daughter does much better with this). You may also want to consider having an earlier dinner. We got into the bad habit of eating dinner at 6:30pm or later and noticed that dinnertime was a disaster every night. We decided to move it to 5pm and it made a world of difference. Here's a picture of my son (he actually FELL ASLEEP at the table a couple of summers ago after a long day of playing outside).



11. Not feeling well:

If your child isn't feeling well, it's unlikely that he or she will eat well at a meal. This is often the first sign that an illness is coming on. In this case, make sure that you keep your child hydrated, and offer easy-to-digest foods such as white rice, banana, white bread, soda crackers, popsicles, soup and apple sauce until his/her appetite returns.

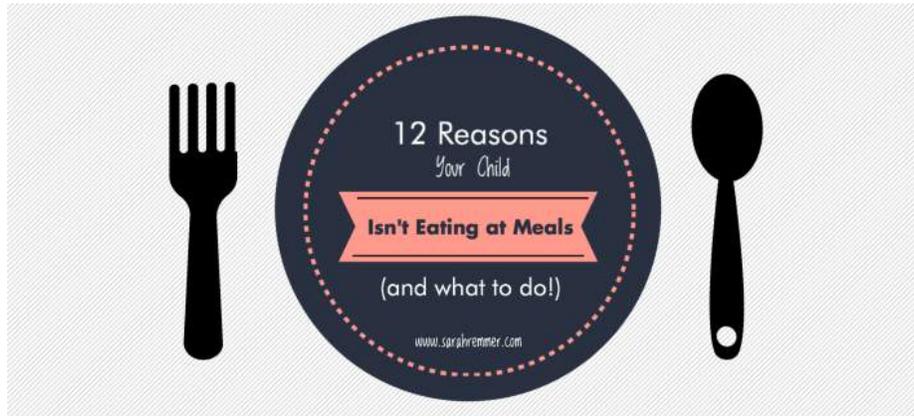
Offer foods often when your child is sick but don't push them—fluids are most important. If you're noticing that your child isn't interested in eating and is acting a bit "off", unusually tired or lethargic, this could be the case.

Your child could also be having digestive troubles (such as constipation or acid reflux) which can make it uncomfortable to eat. If you suspect that this is the problem, avoid "binding foods" such as white starchy carbohydrates, bananas and cheese and focus more on high fibre whole grains, fruits and veggies, dried fruit and lots of fluids (constipation) and steer clear from high acid foods such as tomatoes and citrus fruits, and spicy foods (acid reflux). If these issues persist, talk to your child's doctor or a paediatric dietitian for further help.

12. Too much milk (or juice):

Between-meal-milk-drinking can have a satiating effect. Milk contains fat as well as protein—two nutrients that make kids feel full. Toddlers and children should be offered no more than 500mL (two cups) of milk per day. Try offering half a cup at each meal (or right after), which leaves room for another half cup before bedtime if that is part of your routine. Water should be the only fluid offered between meals for hydration.

Juice contains excess calories and sugar that children don't need – it fills them up with little nutritional value. Did you know that a 250 mL (1 cup) juice box contains six teaspoons of sugar? Imagine adding that to your morning coffee. That's too sweet! If your children drink juice, limit it to no more than 125 mL (1/2 cup) per day and water it down (and offer at meals with food).



1. Too much pressure

- don't hover
- let your child self-feed
- focus on family time

3. Boredom

- add more variety to meals/snacks
- ask your child for input

5. Too many distractions

- don't allow screens or toys at meals
- space your children apart so that they can't poke/play during meals
- put a footstool under your child

7. 'Super-taster'

- Roast veggies
- Choose naturally sweet veggies such as carrots, sweet potato, sweet peas etc.
- Serve veggies with dips such as ranch dressing, peanut butter, or tomato sauce or ketchup
- Add fruit to blander meals

9. Too many snacks

- don't let your child "graze"
- offer a snack only if there is more than 2 hours in between meals or before bed

11. Not feeling well

- focus on fluids and hydration
- avoid binding foods such as banana, cheese, white starches (constipation)
- Avoid high acid foods such as citrus, tomato, spicy foods (acid reflux)

2. Not enough say

- involve your child in shopping, prepping, cooking
- give your child "structured choice"
- serve meals "family style"

4. Simply not hungry

- try to accept "I'm not hungry" as an acceptable reason not to eat
- make sure your child hasn't eaten too many snacks

6. Portions are too big

- Serve a little bit of everything, in small amounts at first
- let your child serve him/herself
- focus on family time

8. It's a texture thing

- leave lots of time for creative play
- try a vibrating toothbrush
- add spreads to increase calories
- allow food play

10. Too tired

- make sure your child has a nap if he/she needs one
- he/she will make up for the uneaten food at another meal
- try moving dinner to an earlier time

12. Too much milk or juice

- max. 2 cups milk/day (1/2 cup with each meal)
- no need for juice, but max 1/2 cup/day
- water only in between meals

6

HOW TO SET HEALTHY FOOD BOUNDARIES



By establishing some appropriate mealtime boundaries with your kids (and enforcing them consistently), you can regain control over mealtimes (the what's, where's and when's of feeding) and allow your kids to take care of the rest (whether and how much they eat). Although hard to relinquish some of the control, the feeding roles are key when establishing your family's mealtime boundaries, and growing mindful eaters who are able to work up an appetite for meals and stop when they're comfortably full. It's also key for creating structure and order when it comes to feeding and eating—otherwise, meals can easily become chaotic and stressful.

Establishing these boundaries early on (in infancy and early toddlerhood) makes things a lot easier as they get older, but they can be set at any time (keeping in mind that the older they are, the more patient you'll have to be).

Set Healthy Mealtime Boundaries and Stick to Them

Toddlers and young kids thrive when there's a bit of structure and when healthy (and fair) boundaries are put into place (especially when they're enforced consistently). Feeding is one area of parenting that tends to be less structured and inconsistent, and that's why meals are often frustrating and chaotic, and it's also why picky eating is such a common concern. The trickiest part with setting boundaries is knowing what will realistically work for your family and being consistent with them. It may take a bit of trial and error to figure this out.



Examples of healthy mealtime boundaries

(and ones that we have set in our house):

1) Everyone must come to the table for meals, but there is no rule that they have to eat:

There's nothing more frustrating than preparing, cooking, and serving up a healthy and yummy meal for your family, only to have your child refuse to come to the table, saying that he's not hungry. Understandably, many parents might reply with "you don't have a choice, come to the table and eat!" OR they may allow their child to continue playing (or whatever they're doing) and come to the table when they feel like it. Both scenarios are common and both are problematic.

Let's explore further...

The first scenario: When you say to your child “you have to eat”, this automatically puts pressure on your child, makes them feel like eating is a chore, and also makes the meal that you’ve prepared seem less desirable. With the best of intentions, you’re turning your child OFF of eating even more.

The second scenario: Allowing your child to either not come to the table to eat, or letting him be in charge of when he decides to join is common for parents who feel too exhausted and drained to fight with their child to come to the table. I’ve been there, and understand. But what it’s doing is shifting the role of “when” food is served over to the child (when it is your responsibility to decide when food is served). In this scenario, it’s important to remember that mealtimes aren’t just about eating, they’re also about family time. Regardless if your child wants to eat or not, he should join the family at the table.

One of the most transformative phrases when it comes to feeding kids is “YOU DON’T HAVE TO EAT”. When my son says “But I’m not hungry” or “I don’t want spaghetti again!” I calmly reply “You do not have to eat, but it’s mealtime and you must come to the table.” I usually give my kids one or two warnings that mealtime is coming, so that they have a chance to finish what they’re doing, whether it’s playing outside or building lego, and I find that this helps a lot. And nine times out of 10, even if they initially say that they’re not hungry, they usually eat a fair amount of their meals happily. My kids aren’t excused until at least 10-15 minutes have passed and must ask to be excused. If they say that they are full and are done eating, I usually remind them to make sure their tummies are happy (full) and that the kitchen will be closed after-

wards. I also make sure that the focus is not completely on the food, and that we're sharing our favourite moments of the day (or challenges), and visiting as a family.

If you have a slow eater, you may want to set a timer for 30 minutes so that meals don't drag on forever and ever. This allows your child to better pace him/herself during a meal.

2) There are no toys, screens, or other distractions at meals:

We talked about this in lesson 4, but I wanted to bring it up again because it's definitely one of our mealtime boundaries and I encourage all parents to establish it with their families too. We reserve mealtime for family/catching up time and discourage mindless/distracted eating. This goes for parents too—no iPhones or computers at the table.

3) Mealtime manners must be followed:

We try to teach our kids to be respectful at the table (even if they're not eating) and use some reasonable manners. Here are a few that we teach our kids to follow:

- It's not ok to throw food or deliberately make a mess
- There are no rude comments to other family members or about the food
- Kids are expected to sit nicely and will be asked to get back to the table if they have left without being excused. Getting up from the table throughout the meal (unless they have to use the bathroom) is not acceptable. Making sure that

your kids have had lots of activity and have had the chance to “shake out their wiggles” before a meal can help with this. You can also try the footstool trick that I talked about in lesson 4.

- Kids are expected to use age-appropriate utensils (or at least try) and otherwise they can politely use their fingers (if it’s finger food).
- Exploring new or previously rejected foods by playing with them nicely, stacking them, touching them or licking them are all acceptable. We have a “tester” plate for these specific foods.
- Kids should be asked to be excused from the table and are expected to clear their plates.
- Our kids are expected to say “please” and “thank-you”



4) There's no short-order cooking:

Although I offer lots of variety and I always serve at least one food that I know my kids like, there is one meal (and

only one) served. If my kids would like to add a dip to dip their foods in or have their foods plated a certain way (let's say so that they're not touching), that's ok. They are also allowed to have more of their favourite food as long as they've attempted to "explore" the other foods on their plate first.

5) The kitchen is closed after mealtime:

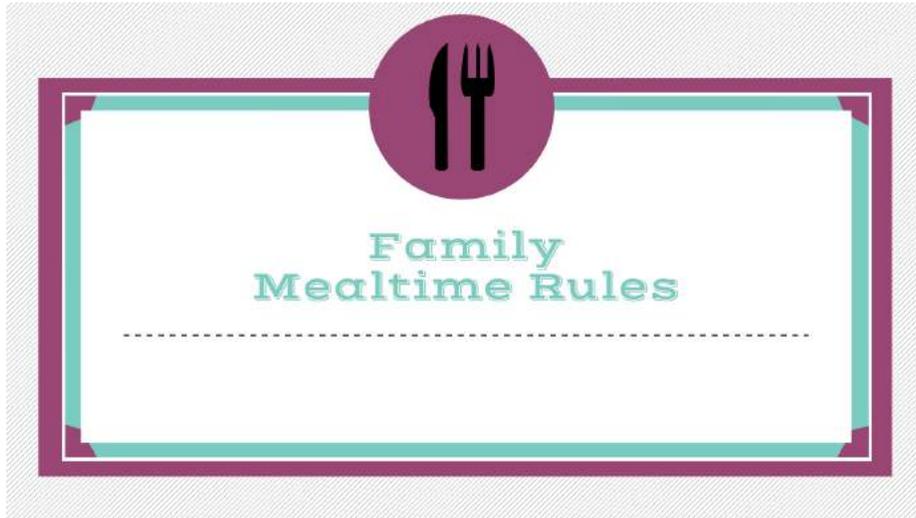
If my kids declare that they're full and done (but if I feel that my kids haven't eaten enough), I remind them that it's a good idea to make sure that their tummies are satisfied because the kitchen will be closed until the next meal or snack (or the next morning). Requests or demands for snacks outside of these times are gently turned down, with a reminder that they had a chance to eat at the last meal or snack, and they chose not to. Over time, kids learn how to regulate their appetite healthfully this way.

6) There are no snacks after a meal:

After-meal requests for snacks or milk are gently turned down, and instead, we as the parents decide when snack time is according to when meal times were. Because my kids are five and two, we offer a snacks in between most meals and sometimes before bed (not often), so that there are eating opportunities every two to three hours or so. Kids have small tummies, so need to eat often, but they do not need to graze around the clock—this in fact won't allow your kids to develop a healthy appetite for meals, which can turn into negative power struggles at meal-times. We'll talk more about grazing in the next lesson.

These are our personal mealtime boundaries and might

work well for your family too. Know that each family is unique and you should tailor your own to what works for you and your family.



Acceptable

- ✓ Choosing which served foods you would like to eat and how much of each
- ✓ Exploring foods in a polite way, by touching, licking, feeling, stacking etc.
- ✓ Not liking a food (expressing this in a polite way i.e. saying "no thank you")
- ✓ Testing out a food and politely spitting it out in your napkin if you don't want to swallow it
- ✓ Asking for more of any food after you've explored the other foods on your plate

Unacceptable:

- ✗ Refusing to come to the table - meals are about family time too
- ✗ Bringing toys, screens, or other distractions to the table
- ✗ Making rude comments about the food
- ✗ Throwing food or deliberately making a mess
- ✗ Asking for separate meals (there is no short-order cooking)
- ✗ Asking for snacks right after a meal. The kitchen is closed after mealtime.
- ✗ Getting up from the table before you've been excused



7

WHY (AND HOW) TO END THE SNACKING INSANITY

Healthy snacks are important for kids, as they provide an opportunity to boost daily nutrition. Kids also need to be fuelling up more frequently than adults do because of their smaller stomach size. But snacking can also easily get out of control. One of the most common reasons why kids don't eat well at meals is because they're snacking too much in between. Today I'm going to teach you how to regain control over snacks, and make them a positive part of your child's eating routine, instead of being the cause of mealtime struggles.



Are you a slave to the snack?

It seems that moms and dads are constantly reaching into their purses, bags, strollers, and pockets for portable snacks to hand to their squirmy tots in malls, at the playground, on walks, and just about anywhere else. And trust me, I am guilty of it too. I rarely leave the house without a bag full of snacks just in case we are out for longer than planned.

But the truth is – although for the most part nutritious – these snacks are sometimes given to my kids for the wrong reasons: in the car to keep them occupied while I’m trying to focus on the road, in the stroller to make long walks home from the park more tolerable, or in the grocery store when I’m waiting in line and don’t want to deal with a screaming toddler. Let’s be honest, sometimes it comes down to survival, and I get that. But when random, all-day munching becomes a habit, mealtime struggles often ensue.

But snacking itself isn't the problem.

Snacking is not something that we should give up or phase out. In fact, toddlers and kids require more frequent eating opportunities than adults do because of their smaller stomachs. And the problem isn't necessarily the types of snacks that are offered (although snacks do tend to be less nutritious, especially when coming from a box or package). **It's how and when they are offered** that causes problems for our kids. Creating more structure around snacks for my kids has not only improved their overall nutrition, but has made mealtimes much more enjoyable for everyone.



Kids don't need to eat around the clock

Healthy snacking is important for kids, to fill their small tummies between meals that are spread apart by more than three to four hours. Kids don't, however, need a constant influx of calories throughout the day. In fact,

it's important to allow enough time in between eating so that kids can develop an appetite for the next meal or snack. If they are constantly grazing, they will never know what true hunger (or comfortable fullness) feels like. As such, it will be more difficult for them to eat mindfully.

As a child grows and becomes older, so does the size of his stomach.

By about 12 months of age most kids are eating about six times per day, with the last meal typically consisting of warm milk, formula or a breastfeeding session. Toddlers tend to eat every two to three hours, while older kids may be able to go three, maybe even four hours between meals. By the time kids are school-aged, they can move to three meals and one (maybe two) snacks per day depending on timing of breakfast and lunch. Snacks should, for the most part, be nutrient-dense, as to fill nutritional gaps from meals.

One way that we do this in our house, is if my son doesn't drink his milk at breakfast, I might offer yogurt (which has similar nutrients) for a mid-morning snack. Or, if he doesn't eat very many vegetables at lunch, I might offer cut up veggies with hummus for an afternoon snack.

The typical snack aisle foods such as goldfish crackers, fruit snacks, pretzels and character-shaped cookies that I often see being handed out by parents are a far cry from nutrient-dense and fill precious space in little tummies that should largely be reserved for healthier food. These foods, similar to dessert foods, can be served occasionally (even once a day) to teach the importance of balance and fun, but ideally shouldn't be offered as snacks.

Parents should be in charge of meal timing

We've now established that parents decide WHEN meals and snacks are served—not kids. For example, in our house where we have a two-and-a-half year-old and a five-year-old, breakfast is usually served around 7:00-7:30am, a snack offered between 10 and 10:30am, lunch is usually around 1pm, an afternoon snack is offered at around 3:30 and dinner is served at about 6:00pm. There isn't usually a bedtime snack offered, because bedtime is usually at 7:30pm, just an hour and a half after dinner. If I didn't establish this schedule (which is a bit flexible from day to day), eating would become a free-for-all in our house. If my kids were in charge, they would likely ask for snacks constantly and I would be left scrambling for food all day, only to battle it out at meal-times. Instead, our kitchen is always closed after meals and planned snacks, which means that there is no random eating in between.

What about milk?

Milk, although nutritious, is filling and is often over-consumed by kids during the day (which can exacerbate or even be the cause of picky eating at meal times). As mentioned in lesson 4, I suggest to offer no more than about two cups of milk per day to toddlers over one year (about 1/2 cup at or right after mealtimes and maybe 1/2 cup before bed) and water in between meals.

Don't worry—your child won't starve.

You now know that although you set the meal and snack schedule, your kids should be responsible for whether

and how much they eat at those times. They also won't starve if a request for a snack is denied, because they will have another opportunity to eat soon enough. Kids aren't all cut from the same cloth when it comes to eating frequency either. My son (five years old) has always eaten a lot at meals, whereas my daughter (two) eats smaller portions, so may need more opportunities to eat than my son when she's his age. That's why I usually give parents the two to four hour range for eating opportunities. There should always be at least a two hour period in between eating times, but kids DO need to eat at least every four hours.



Here's why it's ok to turn down random snack requests:

Just the other day, my five year-old son came into the kitchen as I was cleaning up from dinner (of which he ate well), and almost sub-consciously said "I'm hungry, Mom." As he said it, he looked like he was searching for something to do. I looked at him and said "Ben, you just ate dinner. I want to you really listen to your tummy and tell me if you're truly hungry." He stared off, clearly pondering what I had said. I jumped in again and said "I wonder if, instead of feeling hungry, you feel bored?" He looked at me and said "yes, I'm bored."

They're bored

I realized then that what I had predicted about my son's random snack requests was true: most of the time, he was

bored, not hungry. He had gotten into the habit of saying “I’m hungry,” when really, he was just looking for something fun to do.

Up until the age of about three or four years old, parents don’t have to worry much about kids “mindlessly eating,” because babies’ and toddlers’ appetites are deprivation-driven. In other words, they eat when they’re hungry and stop when they’re full. Research shows, however, that at around the age four, environmental cues start to influence kids’ eating behaviours. So, because my son was bored, and in the kitchen (seeing food), he would have likely eaten if given the chance (and this is true of most adults too!). Again, by setting specific meal and snack times, we are giving our kids the chance to feel true hunger, and eat until they are satisfied.

What we’ve found in our house, is that requests to eat beyond the set meal and snack times stem from my kids either a) not filling their tummies enough at meals, or b) they are bored and saying “I’m hungry” out of habit or simply for something to do.



They've built a snack habit

Besides requesting snacks out of boredom, kids also often request snacks out of habit or association. Does this sound familiar? As soon as your little one hops into the stroller, she gets a snack. This results in an association being formed between riding in the stroller and eating, regardless if she's truly hungry or not. Similarly, as soon as afternoon cartoons are turned on, she's given a bowl of goldfish crackers to munch on. The association that is formed is between television and food (you can see how this may not serve her well later...).

Having three young kids myself, I completely understand this reliance on snacks from time to time to keep the peace. And once in a while it's no big deal. But when food associations are formed, or when random snack requests are fulfilled regularly, we are teaching our kids to be mindless eaters, which is the opposite of what we want to do.



Kids need to learn self-regulation

When there is structure around food timing and when eating opportunities are at the same time everyday (with a bit of flexibility of course), kids are better able to learn self-regulation. This will help your kids build hunger for mealtimes, eat enough to last until the next eating opportunity and stay tuned in to their hunger and fullness mechanisms both during and in between meals and snacks. If there's a lack of structure, this means that kids will either not be hungry at the start of a meal or be overly hungry, neither of which are beneficial. When kids are allowed to snack all day (or drink milk all day), it prevents them from ever having the opportunity to feel true hunger or develop a good appetite for meals. Grazing (or between-meal milk-drinking) poses a much bigger problem for picky eaters, who have a hard time trying new foods to begin with, let alone when they come to the table full on snack foods.



Tip: Don't always offer your child's faves

When you do offer a snack, make sure that you're varying what you offer from day to day, even if this means serving foods that you're not sure your kids will eat. Parents tend to offer foods that they KNOW their kids will eat at snacks (their favourites), and this is largely because they haven't eaten well at the previous meal, so parents are trying to get nutrition into their child to compensate for this. What happens though, is a vicious cycle of kids "holding out" for their favourite snacks, therefore not eating well at meals. Instead, offer a wide variety of foods at snack time so that your kids aren't expecting their favourites. When offering a snack, offer one to three foods (I usually offer two) always including something with protein (leftover meat, cheese, yogurt, cottage cheese, nuts, nut butter, hardboiled egg, hummus etc.) and pairing it with a fruit or vegetable (or whole grain food). I try to use snacks as an opportunity to boost veg-

gies and fruit, so I most use the protein + veggie or fruit combo (see my snack ideas list below).

How to End the “Graze Craze”

Establishing new boundaries and routines with kids is never an easy task. Resistance is inevitable. But kids are resilient and will adapt quickly (some quicker than others) to changes in routine around meals and snacks. My friend Andrea Nair, Parenting Expert and Registered Psychotherapist generously weighed in when I told her about this lesson. She believes that parents shouldn't be afraid to train their children. “When parents approach new routines with a coaching mindset, things tend to go smoother. Although, there might be a period of resistance when something new is learned, change can happen with repetition, empathy and clear instruction.” she says. New routine building takes some time—perhaps a week or two to feel solid. For parents, if new boundaries are truly important, then keeping them in place, with kindness will help children accept them in a timely way.

3 steps to handling random snack requests

1. Acknowledge the request:

If your child is “whining” for food (which is almost always the case with random snack requests), it's actually best not to react at all (until the whining stops that is). When your child is in melt-down mode, it's usually not the best time to have a level-headed conversation. Instead, wait until your child is calm, and acknowledge his request by stopping whatever you're doing, kneeling down (so that

you're at his level) and saying something like "it sounds like you would like to eat right now" or "I understand that you want a snack". Your child wants to be heard, and it's important that you acknowledge that.

I would steer away from acknowledging actual hunger though (because it's hard to know if your child is actually physically hungry—only he or she knows this). If you have a hunch that he is requesting a snack because he's bored or wants something fun to do, you could initiate a conversation similar to the one I mentioned above between my son and I.

2. Instead of saying "no", say "yes, but just not right now"

After acknowledging your child's snack request, you could empathize with him by saying "I know it's hard not getting what you want right when you want it" or "I know that those muffins look really yummy and you probably want to eat one right now" (let's say, if you've just baked muffins). Follow this up by explaining that even though it's not time to eat NOW, there will be another opportunity to eat soon. Kids don't often react well to the answer "no", so if you can reframe your answer as "YES, we can have a snack (or meal), but just not right now" (referencing the future eating opportunity instead), they are more likely to react positively. As soon as kids know that there is a future eating opportunity, the desperation to eat RIGHT NOW tends to dissipate. You are not saying "no" to the request, but instead saying that it's just not time yet.

3. Remind your child to eat until satisfied at mealtimes:

If your child didn't eat well at his previous meal, this would be a good opportunity to remind him to fill his tummy at the next meal so that he doesn't get really hungry soon after (because the kitchen will be closed afterwards). You could say something like "remember when you said that you were full after only one bite of your hamburger at lunch? This might be why you're feeling like you need a snack right now. Let's remember this at dinnertime tonight" (and then remind him again at dinner time).

When my child hardly touches a meal, I would first ask him some important questions that may encourage better eating, and then would usually say something like "that's fine if your tummy is full, but remember, the kitchen will be closed until breakfast time tomorrow, so make sure to fill your tummy now so that you're not hungry before bed" (if bedtime less than a couple of hours after dinner). With my five year-old, I talk in more detail about what "filling your tummy" means (it should be full, but not over-full or hurting), but with my two-year-old, I stick to "make sure your tummy is happy." Young kids should stay at the table for at least 10-15 minutes (even if they are "done,") to allow family bonding time (and within this 10 or so minutes, kids often keep munching when the pressure is off!).

Top Take-Aways

- Snacks are often given to kids for the wrong reasons and at the wrong times (usually too frequently). Random snacks can keep kids' bellies feeling full all day, which can lead to mealtime battles and picky eating tendencies.
- Toddlers and kids require more frequent eating opportunities than adults do because of their smaller-sized stomachs, so they do usually need eating opportunities every two to four hours (some of these falling into the "snack" category). But the problem isn't necessarily the snack itself. It's **how and when** they are offered that causes problems for our kids. Creating more structure around snacks is key.
- It's important to remember that parents are in charge of WHEN food is served—not kids. Kids however do get to decide how much and if they eat at these times
- After age of three, kids' eating isn't completely deprivation driven like it was in baby and toddlerhood, which means that they may request snacks because they are bored, because they see food, or out of habit.

Action Steps

1. Establish more structure around snacking. Toddlers need eating opportunities every two to three hours, and preschoolers and older kids need them every three to four hours. If there is more than a two-hour gap in between meals, consider offering a snack. If bedtime is more

than two hours after dinner, a light bedtime snack can be offered (at least two hours after dinner).

2. Don't always serve your child his or her favourite snacks. He or she will hold out for these foods and not eat well at meals. Instead, offer lots of variety and aim for one or three foods in small portions, always including some protein pairing with either a fruit, vegetable OR a whole grain food.

3. Have patience when establishing your new food routine with more structure. Make sure that you acknowledge your child's request for a snack, and resist the urge to say "no", but instead say "yes, you will get a chance to have a snack, but just not yet. The kitchen is closed for now."

4. Always remind your child to fill his or her tummy at mealtime, because the kitchen will be closed afterwards and there won't be another opportunity to eat until __ time.

SNACK ATTACK!
The ultimate healthy snack list for kids
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1. Apple slices with vanilla greek yogurt
2. Cheese and whole grain crackers
3. Banana with peanut butter to dip
4. Popcorn and a glass of milk
5. An orange with some almonds
6. Greek yogurt and grapes
7. Homemade muffin with cheese
8. Homemade trailmix: nuts, unsweetened dried fruit whole grain cereal (with a few chocolate chips)
9. Frozen fruit and yogurt smoothie (made with milk)
10. Whole grain cereal with milk
11. Edamame beans or chickpeas
12. Carrots and cucumber with hummus
13. Peaches (or any fruit) with cottage cheese
14. Favourite raw veggies with ranch dip or hummus
15. Brown rice cakes with peanut butter and banana slices
16. Leftover cooked tortellini noodles with tomato sauce to dip
17. Oatmeal with yogurt
18. Apple sauce with cottage cheese
19. Homemade whole grain cookie and a glass of milk
20. Hardboiled egg and a plum
21. Seeds (pumpkin, sunflower etc.) with dried fruit and whole grain cereal
22. Whole wheat pretzels with hummus
23. Whole grain granola bar with milk
24. Fruit salad with vanilla yogurt/peanut butter dip (1/2 cup greek yogurt with 1 tbsp peanut butter and cinnamon)
25. Leftover french toast strips with yogurt and apple sauce
26. Cherry tomatoes and tzatziki dip
27. Freeze dried fruit and cheese
28. Pears slices with almonds or almond butter
29. Celery with natural peanut butter and raisins or raisins
30. Milk with cut-up fruit

*notice that some of these snacks include milk (I know that I said that milk should only be offered at meals and maybe before bed). If you're including milk in the snack (as the protein part of the snack), offer water at one of the meals instead.

8

THE DESSERT DILEMMA--HOW TO HANDLE TREATS



I am constantly asked questions by parents who are struggling to know how to manage treats with their kids. There's a lot of confusion about when, how much and how often to offer them, as well as how to talk about treats with their kids. And when it comes to picky eaters, it can be even trickier, because parents worry that their kids aren't eating enough nutritious foods, so may feel compelled to withhold treats or bribe their child to eat their healthy food in order to get the dessert after a meal. I often get frustrated and maybe slightly skeptical parents asking me "so, if my kid doesn't eat his meal, I'm still supposed to let him have dessert afterwards?!" or "I feel like all my kid will eat is junk—he won't touch his healthy food but then asks for dessert or an unhealthy snack after!"

I hear you, and I'm going to answer your questions and concerns here in this lesson. This topic is often one of the biggest feeding pitfalls for parents, especially for those who have picky eaters. And they're often surprised and

relieved to hear that handling treats is easier than they think.

The ultimate goal:

Remember when I talked about feeding through your “long-term lens” vs. your “short-term lens” and why it’s so important (I think that was back in chapter 3)? The same logic applies to treats and desserts. Our goal as parents is to raise kids who are able to enjoy and savour delicious desserts and treats moderately for the rest of their lives. Unfortunately, many worried parents use short-term feeding strategies (bribing, withholding, forbidding) that might limit the amount of treats and sweets that their kids eat now (and perhaps increase the amount of healthy foods that their kids eat in any meal), but long-term, this nurtures unhealthy thoughts and habits when it comes to dessert foods. It makes treats much more appealing in the child’s eyes and makes healthy foods less appealing. Treats become the forbidden fruit, so to speak—they are the prize at the end of a meal, or the amazing treasure that mom never let’s me have (or that is strictly limited). That’s not what we want. Instead, we want our kids to grow to be able to eat treats without feeling the need to binge on them, sneak them, or hide them. We want them to eventually be able to pick and choose the dessert foods that they truly love (this is the one area that we WANT our kids to be picky in) and leave the ones that aren’t worth it.



And I'm going to teach you how to raise kids who think this way.

But first, a personal story:

I've always been fairly relaxed about treats with my kids knowing what I know as a Dietitian and the psychology behind feeding. And so far, so good. My kids love treats (like I do), but they aren't obsessed with them or need them everyday or every meal. My five-year-old son, however, could have easily become obsessed with treats if I withheld them or was really strict about them. He, like many kids his age, is curious about new treats that he sees in the store or witnesses other kids eating. And now that there are birthday parties almost every weekend and hockey team get-togethers (at McDonalds), he's been exposed to lots of foods that I've been able to avoid up until this point. Things like pop, all sorts of candy, and sugary gum.

I've recently realized that I've been relaxed about treats—yes—but my treats are fairly tame. They have been

homemade (and fairly healthy) cookies, desserts that I've made from scratch, ice cream, or the odd piece of birthday cake at birthday parties. But now that he's in school and is going to friends houses without me sometimes, he's been exposed to a whole new sugary world. And it does make me anxious—especially when I know that he LOVES sweets to begin with. As much as I want to, I know that I can't shelter him any more. Nor should I.

Recently, he's been really curious about two things in particular: pop (like coke) and sugary bubble gum. Two things that I cringe thinking about him consuming. As much as I want to say “no, we don't eat those things. You can have water or milk instead”, I decided to practice what I preach and let him have some pop. I didn't make it a big deal, but instead let him order some pop with his meal one day and let him drink it. I watched his expression when he drank it (and hoped to God that it was going to be one of disgust). He puckered his lips and said “Mmm, this is good Mom, but it's spicy”. I replied “interesting—I can see why you would think it was 'spicy'”.

My goal was to stay as neutral as possible and allow him to decide for himself whether or not he liked it. He ended up drinking about half of it and leaving the rest. And he hasn't asked for it since. All that it took was him trying pop to know that it isn't perhaps as amazing as he once thought. The same thing happened with gum—he's been allowed to chew it now and then (when we're around) and it's become an occasional thing that isn't really a big deal.

Here's what I've learned about my sweet-tooth son: He needs to try EVERYTHING in a neutral zone (where

there's no judgement or bias) and decide for himself whether he likes it or not. He's very curious. The more I say no or withhold something (or make a big deal out of it), the more he wants it. He likes to have something sweet every day, but doesn't need a lot of it. And here's the funny thing—he's exactly like me. And SO many other kids and adults.

Top 10 Tips For Managing Treats:



1. Offer them randomly:

Try not to create too much anticipation around dessert or a treat. For example, I often hear “Friday night is treat night” or “we have one treat day a week.” Making a big deal out of serving sweets or treats or limiting them to only one day a week will only increase the excitement and anticipation of it, often resulting in over-indulging or the “get it in while you can” mentality. Instead, try ran-

domly offering dessert after a meal (perhaps a meal that you they've eaten well) or randomly suggesting that the family go for ice cream. This way, your kids won't "save up" for it or associate it with a particular day of the week or meal of the day. About once or twice a week we offer our kids dessert but it's random enough that they don't ask for it or expect that dessert is coming. Sometimes it's after a lunch, sometimes it's after dinner or sometimes it's in the middle of the day. From my experience, the more random, the better. This way, you can sit back and let your child enjoy his or her dessert, in an amount that feels fair to both of you, and not worry that it's going to compromise his or her nutrition, because you're not offering it every day.

2. Don't make a huge deal of it:

Try to stay neutral when it comes to treat foods. If your child brings home a bag of Easter eggs or Valentine's Day candy from school and you immediately take it away and say "no treats now" or are strict with amounts saying "you can only have one a day" then your child will likely want the treat food ten times more than when he walked through the door. Instead of making a big deal out of it, try to stay calm, matter-of-fact and neutral. Say something like "that's kind of fun that you got those from school today. You can enjoy a few after dinner tonight if you want, but let's put them away now so that your tummy is hungry for dinner." Or you include them in a meal or snack and say "let's all enjoy a few when we have our afternoon snack" and then pair them with fruit and yogurt as an example. This way, it puts the treat food on a more level playing field with other healthier foods.

3. Don't be a treat micro-manager:

I often witness health-conscious parents hover over their kids at birthday parties, making sure that they don't eat too much birthday cake or too many candies or too much pop. I get it—I would be one of those hovering parents if I wasn't a paediatric Dietitian and didn't know better. When parents do this though, it makes kids feel like they can't really enjoy their treats—that they're actually forbidden and mom doesn't *really* want them to have them. In turn, this usually increases the desirability of the treat and increases the chances of our kids eating more of them when you're not around. Try to back off and trust that your child will eat enough of the treat to feel satisfied. Take a deep breath and remember that you're feeding with your long-term lens on. Yes, he or she may eat a lot of sugar at one sitting from time to time—that's what kids do. And sometimes they feel sick after. But sometimes that's what they need to learn how to manage those foods. Kind of like a natural consequence.

3. Drop the "treat" title:

When the words "treat" or "junk food" are used, it automatically increases the desirability and mystique of a food. It also implies that the food is almost forbidden, which, in turn, may encourage your kids to feel guilty about eating it or save up for the big indulgence that is to come. I try not to label less-than-healthy foods anything but what they actually are. For example, ice cream, cookie, chocolate, potato chips etc. Most parents wouldn't say to their kids "eat your healthy food" when they are referring to the broccoli on their plates, right?

So I, personally, refer to each food, regardless of its nutritional ranking, by its name.

4. Portion it out:

Instead of bringing a huge bag of potato chips to the couch while watching a movie, portion out an equal amounts into smaller bowls for everyone so that there is some sort of accountability with portions. The psychology behind this is that most of the time, when someone is offered a larger (or unlimited) portion of a food, they will eat more of it. We are programmed to eat foods to completion, therefore, if ice cream, chips, candy, or any other food for that matter is portioned out, it gives us an opportunity to re-evaluate whether we want, or need, to keep going (to portion out more). If we have had enough, but there is still food in front of us (especially yummy treat-like foods), we often fall victim to the see-food syndrome and over-eat.

5. Spoil your child's treat palate:

Up the ante at home and treat your kids to real food. I find that I am really picky when it comes to indulging in treat foods. My mom always had delicious homemade cookies and always baked homemade birthday cakes and other dessert foods for special occasions. Even though I was like my son and always SUPER curious about other store-bought candy, pop and things that weren't served at home, I've grown to love the desserts I was served at home and appreciate real ingredients. You know... like butter, sugar, eggs etc. rather than "hydrogenated palm oil" and "high-fructose corn syrup". Rarely did we eat packaged, processed treat foods growing up (yet we were

allowed to have them from time to time at parties and other events), and I believe that is one of the big reasons that I am more selective with my indulgences now. If I take a bite of a less-than-amazing cookie, I usually stop. Although your kids will be exposed to a plethora of store-bought, processed treat foods throughout their childhood, they will likely become more selective with what they actually eat if they are exposed to high quality delicious foods at home from an early age.

6. Lower the sweet threshold:

Sweet taste begets sweet taste, just like salty taste begets salty taste. In other words, the more sweetness your child is exposed to on a daily basis, the more sweetness it will take to satisfy their sweet tooth. If your kids are used to having super-sweet treats and drinks everyday, they will crave that super intensely sweet taste more. So instead of buying chocolate milk, add a tiny amount of chocolate syrup to regular milk and call it chocolate milk. Or instead of giving your kid a juice box, give them “juice water” which in our household means 95% water and a tiny splash of real 100% fruit juice. Another example is yogurt. Instead of buying sweetened yogurt, buy plain and sweeten with a bit of honey, fruit or maple syrup. Same goes for homemade desserts — play around with the amount of sugar that you add to cookies, squares etc. to see how little sugar you actually need to still produce a yummy and satisfying product.

7. Don't make treats visible in your home regularly:

Even though you're trying to teach your kids that all foods can fit and that treats aren't forbidden, you also

don't want treat eating to become a free-for-all, because we know that this can have long-term health, weight and dental implications. We also want to raise mindful eaters. When you walk into a room or your kitchen and see homemade cookies or a bowl full of chocolates sitting out, what is your first instinct? To eat them, right? Me too. We all fall victim to what I call the "see-food syndrome", even kids. If they see yummy sugary (or salty) foods that they love, it will automatically trigger them to want to eat them. Keep them out of sight—such as in the freezer or in a high cupboard—not to hide them, but to prevent mindless eating by everyone.

8. Offer dessert WITH a meal sometimes:

This is the ultimate way to put treat foods on a more level playing field with other more nutritious foods and take them off of their high pedestal—serve them together! We don't do this often as I don't want my kids to start to ask for it or expect it, but randomly, I'll let my kids have their dessert with their meal. Some kids (like my son) will pick away at both his meal and his dessert throughout the meal, and other kids (like my daughter) will devour her treat and not eat much of her dinner. Either way, you're sending an important message to your kids that will benefit their long-term relationship with food (even though all that your child might eat for dinner is her dessert).

Here are the messages that this strategy conveys to our kids:

- treat foods are not forbidden and we can enjoy them moderately, even alongside healthier foods
- all foods can fit into our diets
- desserts aren't the "prize" at the end of a

meal—we can eat them without feeling pressure to “eat all of our vegetables” first. Sometimes neutralizing foods takes the appeal of the treat down a notch and makes the healthier foods seem not so bad after all.

9. Eat the way you want your kids to eat:

As mentioned in a great post by Maryann Jacobsen over at Raise Healthy Eaters, “Children learn to see food the same way their parents do, which may not always be healthy. Research shows that parents who eat for emotional reasons, feel out of control with eating (called disinhibition) and worry about weight (their own and their child’s), not only are more likely to utilize controlling feeding practices, but tend to have children with similar issues.” Kids who are treat-obsessed may be observing their parents who have unhealthy or out-of-control treat-eating habits (sneaking food, obsessing over food, binge eating, emotional eating, etc.) and modelling after that. It’s important to address your own eating issues as a parent so that you can model not only healthy eating, but also a healthy food relationship.

10. Reassure your child that there will be chances to enjoy treats in the future:

If your child asks for a treat food, but for whatever reason you do not want them to have one, try responding like this: “I understand that you really want (whatever food they are asking for) right now, but it’s not time for that food. You will get another chance to have one tomorrow though!” instead of saying “no, you are not having a treat now”. It’s important to set limits on treat foods, so that

there is some structure, however it's also important that kids learn that treats aren't forbidden or highly restricted. As soon as a child feels that something is forbidden (like treats), it automatically becomes more desirable. This is when kids may start to sneak food and over-indulge when they get the chance, which can lead to unhealthy health implications and bad habits.

One thing that I personally notice with my son, is that if he asks for a treat and my husband or I say "no", he automatically wants it even more and may even freak out a little. But if we calmly let him know that we hear and understand what he's saying ("you are telling me that you really want a treat"), set my limit ("I understand, but we've already enjoyed __ food today") and then let him know that there is another opportunity to enjoy them tomorrow ("But guess what?! We'll have another chance to have one tomorrow!"), 9 times out of 10 he says "ok Mom".



Common Challenges:

Here are some common questions that I get from parents about treats:

1. Dessert is offered when we are out for dinner, but my child hasn't eaten his meal. What do I do?

This situation is tricky, especially when there are other kids who may have eaten well at dinner. A big part of you wants your child to know that he can't just eat dessert—that's not healthy! But unfortunately the alternative (telling him that he can't eat dessert until he eats some of his meal, or withholding dessert if he hasn't eaten his meal) is sending the message that the treat food is the prize (making it more desirable) and that he has to eat his healthy food in order to get the dessert (making the healthy food seem yuckier in your child's eyes). It's also isolating, shaming and punishing your child for not eating his healthy food, which may make him feel embarrassed and self-conscious. There's a fine line between teaching your child about balance and managing treat foods, and making him feel ashamed and left out.

At home, you might just not offer dessert after a meal that hasn't been eaten well. But when you're out, you have less control. When you're eating with a group of people, where there are other kids, your child will be distracted more than usual and might be offered foods that he or she isn't used to eating (and isn't ready to try yet). Or maybe your child is just too excited about the dessert that will be offered, which is completely normal. In any case, the environment is different, and your child wants to be able to take part in the fun of dessert.

When this happens for my kids, I let them have dessert regardless of how much they've had to eat. I don't withhold it. It doesn't happen all of the time, and that's why I feel ok about letting them indulge without eating healthier foods first. And again, we're feeding with our long-term lens on. Sometimes in life, there will be treats served when we haven't had a chance to eat healthy foods first. And that's ok. We can set boundaries and structure around treats (such as not offering them on nights where the kids haven't eaten well), but it's ok to let your kids enjoy them without that boundary when it's a different environment or a special occasion.

2. It seems like there are special occasions such as birthday parties, holidays and extended family dinners almost every weekend. How do we manage all of the desserts that are served?

If you know that there will be lots of fun events and parties coming up, offer treats less frequently than you normally would at home. You don't need to tell your kids that you're doing that, but instead just offer them less. If they ask for dessert one night that you're at home and you've decided not to serve it, you could say something like "there's no dessert tonight, but I know that there will be birthday cake tomorrow night at the party, so that will be fun". There will be times of the year where your kids will be exposed to lots of desserts and treats outside of the home. Try not to be the treat police when this happens, but also do what you can to provide mostly healthy, nutritious foods at home where you can control it.

3. What about holidays like Easter or Halloween where there's a huge amount of junk food that my kids are exposed to? How do we manage that?

As much as you feel the need to play “treat police” during holidays such as these, try not to. It's no fun for you as parents, and it takes the joy away for your kids. Instead, take advantage of these holidays by using it as a teaching tool for healthy and balanced eating habits—an excuse to actually improve your child's long-term relationship with food.

Make holidays less about managing your child's short-term sugar intake and more about teaching them how to manage their indulgences long-term. The latter is much more important.

It's much easier to manage treats before they are in your house, so make sure to wait until the day before (or day of) to buy Halloween candy or Easter eggs, so that you don't have to deal with the “see-food syndrome.” Also, send your kids out with smaller bags or buckets at Halloween and don't hide so many eggs.

Here are three life-long eating lessons you can teach your kids during treat-filled holidays:

Be Brave:

We often encourage our kids to try new foods at meal-times. Instead of policing treat foods, do something that your kids don't expect and encourage them to try a new candy or chocolate treat that they've never had before.

For example, if they always go for gummy-type candies, encourage them to try a mini chocolate bar with nuts in it for a change to see if they like the taste. This will not only put treats on a more level playing field with other foods (which will decrease the desirability of them), but will also encourage them to be more adventurous with all foods (including healthier ones at mealtimes).

Be responsible:

If you take charge of the candy or chocolate stash and police when and how much candy can be consumed, you're sending the message that your kids cannot be trusted with candy. In other words, this doesn't teach them how to moderate their intake of treats. Up until the age of about four, together with your child, choose a daily amount of candy or chocolate that seems fair to have (maybe it's one, two, or four) and allow your child to decide when they are going to have it (it could be for dessert after lunch, as part of a snack in the afternoon, or even WITH a meal). After the age of four (this varies depending on the child), they are likely ready to manage and store their own stash with the expectation that they will adhere to the daily amounts that were negotiated and eat their candy in a designated area (usually the kitchen table where there's few distractions). Giving kids the opportunity to manage their candy stash will take some of the power away from the candy and give them the confidence to manage their treats in a healthy way.

Make mistakes:

Kids learn by making mistakes and however upsetting it is for us parents to see our kids gorge on treats (and even get sick), ultimately, this will teach our kids to mod-

erate their intake of them. Instead of getting angry and punishing kids for eating too many candies, approach the situation calmly and get your child to talk about it. Ask her why she thinks she feels sick and what she might do next time to avoid the same feeling again. Explain the difference between “everyday foods” (healthful foods) and “fun foods” (treats) and how the fun is taken out when too much is consumed. You can say something like, “Our bodies don’t like too many fun foods at once because it doesn’t leave enough room for everyday foods, so they fight back by feeling sick.” Or something like that. Instead of feeling embarrassed and ashamed, your child will learn from her mistake and think twice before doing it again.

Instead of dreading the treat-centered holidays, think of it as a great opportunity to teach your kids about moderation, balance, and healthful indulging.

4. What do I do about grandparents or other loved ones constantly offering my kid treats?

One of my fondest memories of visiting my Grandmother’s house when I was young is enjoying her endless supply of homemade cookies (ones that we didn’t get at home). We all knew where her cookie jar was, and we were free to dip into it as often as we wanted. My mom didn’t stop us from eating more, and I never remember going crazy eating them either. They were simply another reason why going to “Nannie’s house” was so much fun.

My kids know that when they are at Nana’s house, there are delicious homemade cookies (or Girl Guide cookies, which are my dad’s favourite), Kinder surprise eggs,

yogurt covered raisins, fruit juice, breakfast sausages, and other not-so-healthy foods. My parents never go overboard, but it brings them joy to see the smile on my kids' faces when they hand them a treat and that brings me joy, too. My parents know that I never bribe my kids with food, so they respect this and don't do it either. And offering my son special treats is only one little part of the fun experience of going to Nana's house.

What's interesting is that my kids don't expect that they will be served the same "fun foods" at home. They know that Nana's house is different than their house and have never come home from my parents house asking for similar treats. Maybe this is because I don't make a big deal out of it. I don't react in a negative way, because if I did, my kids may start to wonder why it's such a big deal. Treats would likely become more sought after and desired and I would have a bigger issue on my hands.

The more I restrict these sweet treats, the more they will want them, so I choose to allow them in moderation at home and freely at Nana's house.

Try not to feel anxious about the extra treat-giving at by your kids' grandparents houses—or other relatives/friends for that matter—feel confident knowing that what you teach your kids about food at home will shape their relationships with food for the rest of their lives.

If your child spends a lot of time with their grandparents or with another caregiver and you're noticing that the treat-eating is out of control (and is affecting how your kids are at home), consider bringing it up in a gentle and non-confrontational way to let them know that your child loves being with them and finds it fun to eat treats

(and that you're ok with this occasionally), but that you're trying to cut back overall on the treats and that you'd love their help with that. Perhaps offer to give them some of the strategies and tips that you use (or from this chapter).

9

10

**GAME-CHANGING
QUESTIONS TO
ASK YOUR
PICKY EATER**



There are direct and indirect control tactics that parents use at the dinner table, but regardless of how obvious they are (ie. saying to your child “eat your broccoli, or else there is no dessert”) or how subtle they are (ie. over-emphasizing how amazing a particular food is or pushing foods closer to your child on their tray), when kids feel any sort of pressure at meals, they will back off.

The mealtime dialogue can easily become dominated by negativity when kids refuse to eat. Moms and Dads use whatever tricks they have up their sleeves to coax their kids to take a bite, while their kids dig their heels in, declaring that they are “done” or “full” or saying “I don’t like this”, before they’ve given it a chance.

I’ve been there as the parent many times and have had to use deep breathing techniques through many meals while trying to stay calm. It’s not easy! But it does become a whole lot easier when you have some tools in your feeding toolbox. Asking your picky eating child these questions at mealtimes can literally **CHANGE THE GAME** for both kids and parents. They allow kids

to look at their food differently, and they help to take the pressure off of everyone at the table.

Instead of doing what might feel instinctual and hovering over your child making sure that he ingests something that is green, take the pressure off and get him talking.

Make meals more enjoyable and less stressful by asking your child these 10 questions at the table:

1. “How can I make this food easier for you to eat?”

When you notice that your child isn’t interested in what was served, is playing with his food, or declares that he is done, a great question to ask is “is there a way that I can make this food yummiier for you?” When I started asking my preschooler (at the time) this question, it literally transformed our mealtimes for the better. And the answers were very interesting! One night, he asked for ketchup to dip his steamed broccoli into (after which, he gobbled it up), and another night when he said that he didn’t like his chili, I asked him if grated cheese would help, which ended up being a game-changer. Your child might need some ideas from you such as “Do you need dip for your veggies?” or “Would you like me to separate your meat from your rice?”, but nine times out of ten, you and your child might be able to come up with a fun way to make his meal more palatable.

2. “The kitchen will be closed after dinner; are you sure you’re done?”

This is another one that we’ve talked about many times in this course. Giving your kids the heads up that their next eating opportunity is a while away (use an easy

reference such as “after school” or “before you brush your teeth” or “at breakfast time tomorrow”) allows them the opportunity to re-evaluate whether or not they want to be done. It’s part of the parent’s job to determine when meals and snacks are offered, so that feeding doesn’t turn into a free-for-all and so that kids learn self-regulation when it comes to their hunger and fullness. If no warning or reference is given, kids often hold out for their favourite snack, or complain of being hungry an hour after mealtime.



3. "Would you like to have your dessert WITH your meal tonight?"

We talked about treats in lesson 7, and this was one of the strategies that I gave you. By randomly offering treat foods alongside dinner, you not only put all foods on a level playing field, but you also take the desirability of treats down a few notches and eliminate the urgency to

finish the meal quickly so that they can have dessert. Kids tend to either rush through their meal or “save up” for their dessert, eating less of their meal than they usually would. Once a week or so, we will do this at home in an effort to remind our kids that a treat food or two can fit into their day and doesn’t have to be the “prize” at the end of a meal. Because of this, treats add some fun to their day or their meal, but generally speaking, aren’t intensely sought after.

4. “Would you like to serve yourself tonight?”

Serving meals “family style” (similar to a buffet), still allows parents to be in control of what foods are offered, but allows kids (from about three years old and up) feel a sense of control over their meal—something they inherently desire. By relinquishing a bit of control and giving kids the opportunity to plate their own food once in a while, they are able to choose foods that are appealing to them, in amounts that feel appropriate, and are able to organize their food in a palatable way (some kids like their food to be mixed up, some don’t like different foods touching each other.) If kids tend to stick to “safe” or familiar foods and steer clear of new or previously rejected foods, having a separate “tester plate” may come in handy. The tester plate can serve as a pressure-free way to taste-test small bites of foods that may seem weird or “yucky,” with a napkin nearby in case they need to spit it out (which should be ok). It often serves as a great tool to bridge the gap between food rejection and food acceptance.

5. “How full is your tummy?” or “how does your tummy feel?”

If your child declares that she is “done,” instead of asking her to have “three more bites,” nurture her natural ability to eat intuitively by asking how her tummy feels. “How does your tummy feel? Just a little full, half way full, or all the way full?” is something that I often ask my son. Getting your child to think about her internal hunger and fullness cues at an early age, and encouraging her to honour those cues will increase the chances of her continuing to trust her body and eat intuitively later on.

To get your child thinking about this, try using a visual tool (like a mason jar full of oats or quinoa). You could say something like “when MY tummy is happy, it feels this full” (and fill your mason jar until it’s almost full, but not over flowing—you’ve left enough room that you can comfortably put the lid on). You could take a permanent marker and make a “happy” line to indicate how full it should be.

You could also demonstrate what happens if you fill your it too much (by over-flowing the mason jar so that some spills out) and you could say “this is what happens when you eat too much—your tummy becomes too full and starts to hurt—see how I can’t put the lid on?”

Then you could demonstrate how it’s not so great to only fill it a little bit or even half full, because there’s not enough to make it happy yet. You’re showing your child that their tummy will become hungry again too soon—before another meal or snack is offered. This visual will help you kids to learn how self-regulate better and eating more mindfully.



6. “It’s ok that you don’t want to taste that food. Instead, how would you like to explore it?”

It’s not a good idea to pressure our kids to eat a particular food at mealtimes—it can actually make them more wary of it than they were before. Instead, take the pressure off by letting them know that it’s ok not to taste or eat a food, but that they are free to explore it in other less scary ways, like touching, playing with, feeling, smushing, stacking, licking or smelling it (without being rude or disruptive). These are all positive steps towards eventually accepting a food.



7. “You don’t have to eat, but you do need to sit at the table. Mealtime is also about family time. What would you like to share about your day? “

When we make eating a battles of wills (between the parent and child), the joy and connection of eating gets lost. Some parents may win the battle and feel good that their child eats the way they want them to eat, but deep down the child may be full of resentment, eating peas to please his parents and not because he enjoys eating them. It’s important to set the timing boundary for meals (which we’ve talked lots about already) and let your kids know that of everyone needs to come to the table for family time, but it’s just as important to take the pressure off your child (if he or she indicates that they don’t want to eat) by saying “you don’t have to eat”. Once the pressure is off, it’s much more likely that your child WILL end up taking a few bites (or more).



8. “Dinner is in 5 minutes. What do you need to do in order to feel ready to come sit at the table? (i.e. finish building your tower, run around for 5 minutes to get “wiggles out”, take off your costume and put it away etc.)”

Young kids don’t often react well to abrupt transitions or requests to change activities too fast. That’s why giving them a bit of warning before a transition—let’s say to go from playing to eating at the dinner table—works well. Also, reminding them to finish what they are engaged in (puzzle, lego, tv watching, playing outside etc.) so that they don’t feel panicked when asked to come to the table is a great idea.

9. “It sound like you’re hungry. Dinner will be ready in 10 minutes, but did you see the veggie tray and dip sitting on the table over there?”

I recently wrote about the fact that kids are more likely to eat their veggies if those veggies don’t have to compete with other “yummier” foods on their plate at mealtime. This is why I put a veggie tray with dip out before dinner

almost nightly—the kids nibble away before dinner, which takes the pressure off to eat lots of veggies at mealtime (even though I still include veggies at dinner) and keeps them busy while I prep.



10. “It’s ok, you don’t have to like everything (or food xyz), but great job for trying it! What part of it did you not like?”

By noticing and even praising your child for being brave and trying a new food, you’re giving him the confidence to continue exploring it, pressure-free (note: this is quite different from praising your child for EATING a food, which isn’t the best idea). This way, you’re praising the fact that he’s being brave and adventuresome; not that he’s eating a particular food.

You could add the question “what part of it did you not like?” because it gets your child talking about what particular quality was displeasing, which can give you a lot of information. Maybe it was the colour. Or maybe it was

the texture or mouthfeel. Perhaps it was the fact that it was too crunchy or too soft.



10

WHEN YOUR CHILD REFUSES TO EAT VEGETABLES



If there is one food group that kids tend to turn their noses up at, it's vegetables. Sigh...

Veggies—particularly green ones—have a bitter taste, which in hunter-gatherer times, often signaled “toxic” or poisonous. This could be part of the reason why most young kids find green veggies “yucky”—it could actually be a natural survival instinct. Kids also have more taste buds than adults do, which could boost the yuck factor even more. This is important for us parents to know, so that we don't panic when our kids reject them.

The truth is, even though vegetables are an important part of our diets, kids who have a very low vegetable intake likely still have a nutritionally adequate diet (assuming, of course, that they accept a nice variety of other foods). But many parents insist that their child must eat vegetables.

So... should you sneak them in?

If coercion techniques, such as bribing or rewarding, don't work, worried parents often turn to popular blogs and cookbooks which are focused on “sneaking” vegetables (and other healthy foods) into their kids' diets, for some peace of mind.

As a parent of a child who now picks every hint of green out of his food, I get it. I understand the frustration and worry, and sympathize with those who resort to pureeing veggies into breads, muffins, and desserts. But if you regularly hide vegetables in your child's food, you may end

up adding fuel to a fire that would have naturally gone out on its own.

Kids are smarter than you think

As Brian Wansink, PhD, and author of *Mindless Eating* (which I highly recommend) says, kids will catch on to you if you are sneaking veggies into their food. When a piece of zucchini doesn't puree properly and becomes visible in your child's favourite cookie, or if she catches you sneaking an orange pureed concoction into her pancakes, she will become suspicious. If she catches you in the act (which she eventually will) and learns that you are not being up-front with her, those "yucky" veggies are suddenly much "yuckier," and you've got a much bigger problem on your hands. "Now these veggies are SO gross that Mom had to hide them in my food," she may think.

Take the pressure off of yourself

Your job as a parent is to serve a variety of healthy foods at appropriate and consistent intervals in designated areas (you're in charge of the what, where, and when of feeding), and your child is responsible for if and how much he eats. **In other words, it is not your job to make sure that your child eats his veggies—it's his.** You can also relax knowing that vegetables aren't essential for a nutritionally adequate diet. If your child has a varied fruit intake, this can make up for a low vegetable intake. That being said, it's still important to continue exposing your child to a variety of vegetables every day, even though he may reject them. This will increase his chances of accepting them later on.

Adding veggies is different than sneaking veggies

I always add leafy greens to our fruit smoothies and often pack extra veggies into our spaghetti sauce. There is nothing wrong with adding vegetables to a dish to boost the nutritional quality of it. As long as you're open and honest with your child about it and there's no sneaking around. If you can, start early. My son has never known a smoothie to be without some kind of vegetable in it. He also helps me chop (with his plastic knife) vegetables to go into casseroles and sauces. If you expose your child to vegetables early, it is more likely that he will accept them as he grows older.

Give them a fun name

A good friend and I took our boys for smoothies a while back. Both boys see what goes into their smoothies and we don't hide the fact that they contain veggies. But this time, the boys were extra excited about their green smoothies, because my friend asked them if they wanted a "hulk smoothie" for lunch. This made an otherwise regular smoothie exciting for our boys. There is no trickery in renaming a vegetable something creative and fun, and it makes for a more exciting experience for your kids.



Be creative with how you serve them

Toddlers and preschoolers can be really finicky when it comes to how their food is served. Lately, my son prefers all of his food separate. So, instead of mixing blueberries into his oatmeal like I used to, I now put them on the

side. And instead of eating a piece of pizza normally, he now takes all of the toppings off and eats the crust first and then the toppings. Try asking your child how he would like his food served prior to serving it: “Would you like your peas inside your macaroni or on the side?” or “Would you like your spaghetti sauce on top of your noodles or beside them?” You will be amazed at the answers you’ll get and, perhaps, the change in acceptability.

Similarly, experiment with how you cut veggies. For example, my son much prefers cucumber coins over strips these days. He also prefers pepper strips rather than chopped pepper pieces.

And let’s be honest, raw veggies with some sort of dip are much tastier than plain. Make a homemade tzatziki sauce out of plain greek yogurt, minced garlic, lemon juice, and salt and pepper, and serve with peppers, cucumber, and cherry tomatoes; serve carrots and celery with hummus or ranch dip; and try serving steamed broccoli with melted cheese on top.



Give them a choice of two

Instead of saying, “We are having steamed broccoli with dinner,” try giving them a choice of veggie by saying, “Would you like broccoli with cheese sauce or raw veggies and dip?” By doing this, you are handing over some of the control (which toddlers and preschoolers crave) and allowing your child to decide what he is eating, while still ultimately being in control. I call this giving kids “structured control.” My son often surprises me by saying, “both Mommy!”

Let your child help

As messy as it gets and as frustrating as it can be, I still invite my kids to help me prepare dinner some nights because of all of the amazing benefits that I see coming from it. They will not only munch on veggies that I’m chopping up, but they also become whizzes at throwing ingredients into a blender or food processor, and master stirrers of all things. Involving your child in meal-prep has countless benefits. He will be more likely to sit down to family meals and will be much more likely to taste the food that he has had a hand in preparing. It gives kids a sense of pride and accomplishment, as well.

Repetition is ok

There is nothing wrong with serving the same accepted vegetable over and over again. If your child loves peas but rejects every other vegetable, include peas often. But always serve one or two additional vegetables (whatever the rest of the family is having) alongside the peas, even if you know that he won’t eat them. The more exposure

your child has to a variety of vegetables, the more likely he will be to eventually take the plunge and try them. And when new or rejected veggies are served with loved ones, they become less daunting.

Eat veggies yourself

If your child repeatedly sees you enjoying vegetables at family meals or during snack time, she will grow up learning that eating veggies is normal and healthy. I always tell my clients, “eat the way you want your kids to eat,” because we are their models. If your child consistently sees you leaving veggies on your plate or only ever eating one or two types of vegetables, she will have a very hard time widening her own palate. Try to have at least two vegetable sides at family dinners (both raw and cooked), with lots of colour.

Don't force veggies to compete:

Does this sound familiar to you?...

It's like clockwork- every evening when I start preparing dinner, my kids run into the kitchen hungry and whiny. Requests for snacks are rampant and there are little fingers dabbling in dinner ingredients all over the place. Not only does this make it harder for me to prepare dinner, but it is also a patience tester (big time!).

When dinner is finally served, like most young kids, they rarely eat a good portion of veggies. The more appealing fare (the entree, starchy sides etc.) is almost always gobbled up, leaving the greens and oranges untouched for the most part. Not only is this frustrating for my husband

and I, but it also creates food waste and spawns mealtime battles. Although I try to salvage leftover veggies from my kids' plates, most of them are too grimy and slimy by the time dinner is over to justify saving them.

A while back, I discovered a magical solution. So simple, yet so effective, and it works like a charm.

Every evening, before dinner, I put out a veggie tray with dip (I rotate between various hummus, Ranch dip or Caesar dip) or individual raw veggie bowls with a dollop of dip. I include at least three different vegetables of different colours, and sometimes switch up how I cut them. And I say nothing and simply leave them out on the table or on the island. Before I know it, my kids are quietly munching away. **Every. Time.**

This trick keeps my kids busy while I prepare dinner, it takes the “hunger edge” off for them, and it lessens the pressure for everyone to consume enough veggies at mealtime.

It's a win-win-win.

In the Fall and Winter, I often switch out raw veggies for vegetable soup, such as butternut squash, or a bowl of leftover roasted veggies from the night before (usually with some sort of dip). In the summer, I often give them a bowl of frozen peas to munch on—they love them!



I've always assumed that this trick worked because there wasn't any other foods for the veggies to compete with. After all, we know that kids are biologically driven to eat more carb-based (starchy, sweet) foods because they signal "energy-rich", and are often turned off by bitter-tasting vegetables (because in historical times, bitter often indicated "toxic" or poisonous). This is likely why kids often reject veggies and devour starchy foods at mealtimes.

And now there is research to back up my assumption:

Recent data out of Texas A&M University shows that there is an interesting reason why kids (elementary school age) often choose not to eat their veggies at mealtime, thus producing more vegetable food waste afterwards. After analyzing plate waste data from nearly 8,500 students, they found that there's one variable that tends to affect whether kids eat their greens (ie. broccoli, spinach or green beans) more than anything: What the veggies are paired with.

They found that when veggies sit next to other more

appealing foods – let’s say hamburgers or chicken nuggets – they are wasted more (and the entree is considered more appealing) than if vegetables sit next to less appealing foods such as “steak fingers” or “deli sliders,” wherein more of the veggies are eaten. Clearly, plate food waste is related to food pairings, which makes sense.

Young kids also aren’t able to grasp the concept of “nutrition” very well. Adults may choose to eat their veggies first, or at least make a point of eating their veggies because they want to improve their nutrition or manage their weight. Not so with kids. When parents try to coax their kids into eating more veggies for the sake of nutrition or health, kids often become even more turned off than before. They often translate this pressure into “these veggies must be even grosser than I thought—why is it such a big deal that I eat them?!” Kids eat for two reasons: 1) they are physically hungry and 2) because a food is appealing to them.

When veggies don’t have to compete with other “yum-mier” foods, and when there’s no pressure from parents to eat them, they become more desirable and tend to be eaten more. And this is likely why my kids gobble up their veggies when served before dinner – they aren’t competing with any other foods!

Make Veggies More Appealing

I often talk about the game-changing question “how can we make this food yummi-er for you?” and how it can change a “yucky” food into a “yummy” food in a flash. If your child refuses his veggies most of the time, you might find this trick helpful...

10 ways to make veggies “yummiier”



1. **Add them to smoothies:** a big handful of “superhero spinach” in a fruit smoothie won’t change the taste, but will add a lot of nutrition! Other veggies that go well in smoothies: cucumber, kale, carrots and beets.
2. **Serve them in sauce-form:** add them to tomato sauce, marinara sauce, or homemade salsa
3. **Serve frozen “power peas” before supper**
4. **Serve raw veggies with a yummy dips (even ketchup!)**
5. **Make them into a soup:** butternut squash, mushrooms, tomato, or broccoli soups are a delicious way to include more veggies
6. **Make a “ribbon” salad with zucchini or cucumber.**
7. **Spiralize them!** Spiralize veggies and add

them to regular pasta with sauce (zucchini and carrot work great!)

8. Serve them with fruit: When you add some sweetness to veggies, it takes away from their natural bitter taste and makes them more palatable. Try combining spinach with strawberries in a salad, or add tomatoes, peppers and mango to a salsa. Or try sprinkling dried cranberries into a sweet broccoli salad.

9. Add cheese to them: Cheese makes everything yummier, doesn't it? Add cheddar cheese to steamed broccoli or cauliflower, or finely grate some parmesan cheese and dip raw or steamed veggies into it!

10. Make them into "fries" or "chips": Toss in some olive oil, a bit of salt and pepper and herbs/spices of choice and bake! Best veggies for this: yams, sweet potatoes, zucchini, carrot

10 Ways to Make Veggies "Yummier"

"Vegify" smoothies!

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Make it saucy!

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Serve frozen "power peas"

- 3.** a small bowl full of frozen peas is not only fun to eat, but also makes a great pre-dinner nutrient-packed snack

Serve as soup!

- 4.** butternut squash, mushrooms, tomato, or broccoli soups are a delicious way to include more veggies

Make them into ribbons

- 5.** make a "ribbon" salad with zucchini or cucumber.

Serve with cheese

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Dip them!

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Spiralize them!

- 10.** spiralize veggies and add them to regular pasta with sauce (zucchini and carrot work great!)

11

**WHAT TO DO IF
YOUR CHILD
HAS BECOME A
"CARBOHOLIC"**



It's normal for toddlers or preschoolers to go through a “carbaholic” stage. Carb-rich starchy foods like bread and pasta are easy for little ones to love—they don't overwhelm the taste buds and have a soft texture. They've got a mild flavour and if they come in a package, are often sweet or salty (in other words...really tasty). And while starchy carbs *can* be healthy (especially the whole-grain, minimally refined options), if they dominate your child's diet, they can displace other nutrient-dense foods such as meat, dairy, vegetables and fruit.

I always encourage parents to start serving whole grain varieties of bread, pasta, rice etc. right from six months of age, so that their kids become used to their taste and texture early on (and so that they don't know anything different in the early years) versus always having soft white varieties. It's a lot harder for kids to warm up to the denser texture and nuttier flavour of whole grain products when they've grown accustomed to their white

counterparts. And they'll almost always choose the latter if given the chance.



What I find in my practice is that parents often default to starchy carbohydrate foods for snack time and make them the focal point of their kids meals because they **KNOW** that they will be eaten. The problem is, more nutrient-dense foods such as veggies and meats and alternatives will often seem less appealing to little ones when paired with these starchy foods. In fact, there is evidence to show that kids will almost always leave their veggies uneaten when they are paired with “yummier” foods such as starchy carbohydrates. Kids often finish these carb-rich foods and declare that they’re done, before even touching the other foods.

Whole grains are an important part of our kids' diets as they contain fibre, essential vitamins and minerals and give our kids energy. But they shouldn't dominate meals or snacks — we need to reserve lots of room in our kids' tummies for foods like meats and alternatives, healthy fats, milk products and veggies and fruit.



So, what's a parent to do?

For starters, it's important to re-familiarize yourself with the feeding roles that we've talked about in previous lessons (do your job and let your children do theirs), a philosophy that takes the pressure off everyone. Kids often become more open to trying foods because we aren't on their cases, and we can relax a little, knowing that we've fulfilled our role as feeders and can't do much more. It's also important to be patient with our kids and give them a chance to explore those healthy foods without feeling pressured. And perhaps that means letting them go through a bit of a "carbaholic" phase, while con-

tinuing to re-introduce the other healthy foods over and over again...

I'm going to use my pizza example again here:

We reserve one night a week as homemade pizza night in our house—it's easy to throw together and it's a fun meal that everyone enjoys. When my son turned three, he started removing all of his toppings (even the cheese!) As a mom and dietitian, it bothered me that so many nutritious ingredients were going to waste, not to mention the fact that my son was only eating pizza crust for dinner. I had also noticed he gravitated toward the crackers or muffins on his snack plate, while leaving other foods untouched. At the time, it seemed as though he was addicted to carbs.

I took a little solace in knowing it's common for preschoolers to turn into full-fledged carboholics. Because growth slows around the age of two and kids' voracious appetites calm down, it made more sense that he had narrowed his palate. He had become a more selective eater, which, combined with his natural desire for independence and control, led to some very vocal food preferences.

Even though my son used to pick apart his pizza, he always told me how much he loved pizza night, so I tried to practice what I preach as a dietitian and played it cool, knowing that kids often require several exposures to a food before warming up to it. Now that he is five, he happily eats his pizza, toppings and all, which reassures me that my strategy worked. With regular, unpressured access to a variety of healthy foods—and a lot of patience on your part—most preschoolers outgrow the “carboholic”

phase around six or seven and start to expand their palates.

That being said, there are a few strategies that can make it much more likely that your child will eat more than just five dinner rolls at supper...

Here are seven strategies to help your little carb-lover build a balanced palate:



1.

Start serving whole grains early. If whole grains is all your kids know, it's less likely they will ask for the white refined alternatives.

2.

Only reserve 1/4-1/3 of your child's plate for the starch component (the rice, bread, pasta etc.) at most meals. If your child asks for more, and has explored the other foods

on his or her plate, he should be allowed to have more, but limiting the first helping will help your child to learn that starchy foods are only a small portion of a healthy balanced meal.

3.

Reserve no more than about 1/4-1/3 of your own plate for the starch too- your kids are modelling after you!

4.

Serve the protein and veggie portion prior to the starch at a meal: Call the kids to the dinner table, and serve the other meal components (vegetables, protein, etc.) first. Explain that the pasta is still cooking or the rice is cooling down, and they can start with the other foods first. After they've had a few bites, bring on the carbs for a more well-rounded meal.

5.

Try adding veggies to your starch-heavy meals such as spaghetti (try spiralizing zucchini and carrot and adding this to pasta, add lots of veggies to the sauce), add butternut squash to homemade mac n cheese recipes, try using zucchini and eggplant players to lasagna etc.

6.

Skip the starch at snack time: Instead of offering cheese and crackers at a snack, offer apple slices with cheese, yogurt with berries or veggie sticks with hummus. Kids snacks tend to be nutrient-poor and carb-rich (granola bars, crackers, cookies, etc.) whereas they should ideally

contain protein and a fruit or veggie—foods that more nutrient-dense.

7.

Put out a veggie platter prior to a meal: Try putting out a colourful platter of veggies and dip 30-45 minutes prior to dinner for your kids to munch on. Don't prompt them to eat it, but rather quietly place it on the table. You can refer to it if your child says that he or she is hungry before the meal is ready, but don't pressure. You'll be surprised at how many veggies are gobbled up and how this eases the pressure that you feel at mealtimes for your child to eat his veggies (and not fill up on carbs).

Hang in there! This carb-loving phase is normal and if you can use some of the strategies in this lesson to widen your child's palate, he or she will learn to love a variety of foods over time.

12

**WHY YOU NEED
TO STOP DOING
THIS**



I have a picky eater at home. My two-year-old rarely touches her meals these days (mostly lunch and supper), because she decides that it's yucky before she's even tasted it. She has a select few foods that she loves and eats happily, but beyond her safe repertoire, she's just not interested. Because of my knowledge-base and experience (both personal and professional), I'm able to take it in stride and rest easy knowing that it's just a phase (albeit a frustrating one). I go into meals armed with strategies that encourage her to explore foods (even if she doesn't taste them) and I try my best to focus on family time and modelling healthy eating myself. Regardless, meal-times can be really frustrating knowing that she potentially won't taste anything. And I've been tempted many times to "make" her eat at least a few bites (more for my own peace of mind). I've also been tempted to yell:

"WHY ARE YOU SO PICKY??!!!"

Sound familiar?

When kids go through a picky eating phase, parents often turn to all of those quick-fix strategies that we've already talked about: negotiating, bribing, coaxing and micro-managing. We now know that these well-meaning strategies don't work, and can even *enable* your picky eater, making matters worse over time. What many parents don't know, however, is that **labelling their child "a picky eater"**, whether it's directly to the child, around family or friends, or out in public, can have negative consequences too.

When a child hears a word or phrase applied to him

often enough, it “sticks” and could have negative affects on his self-image. Children tend to accept—without question—the labels that we use to describe them, whether it’s referring to their physical characteristics, personality, abilities, and limitations.



When a child is labelled a “picky eater”, “fussy eater”, or “finicky eater”, it not only makes her feel as though she’s incapable of loving a variety of foods, but it also gives her permission to NOT explore new foods—she’s a “picky eater” after all.

Sometimes it’s not so obvious

Sometimes parents don’t come out and label their child a “picky eater” but instead use dialogue that infers that their child is a picky eater. Not-so-obvious ways that well-intentioned parents (or grandparents) label their kids might be saying something like”

“Don’t worry, I didn’t put mushrooms on the pizza because I know you don’t like them.”

“Don’t bother serving him any veggies — he won’t eat them anyway.”

“No, please don’t take any sushi—you don’t like it so let’s not waste it.”

“You won’t like anything on the adult menu, here’s the kid menu instead.”

These well-meaning phrases (after all, you don’t want food to be wasted, especially at a friend’s or family member’s house) often perpetuates picky eating two-fold: it makes a child believe that he does not and will not ever like that food (and yay! he doesn’t even have to try it again!), as well as it doesn’t give him a fair chance to warm up to it (kids often need several exposures to a food before they feel safe enough to taste it).

Sometimes parents are trying to avoid a battle, make things more manageable at the table, trying to avoid food waste or perhaps they say these without even thinking about it based on previous experiences. In any case, it can make a child feel as though he can’t (and won’t ever) like those foods. It’s important to remember that kids’ likes and dislikes can change on a dime. My son has never like mushrooms, until he saw his friend eating them one day. Seeing his friend eat mushrooms and talk about them positively gave him the confidence to try them and like them also. And thankfully I didn’t say anything that discouraged him from trying it even though I was almost positive that he wouldn’t.

When You Assume That Your Child Won’t Eat It

We’ve known for a long time that kids need repeated

(and non-pressured) exposure to certain foods (sometimes 15 or more times) to warm up to them, but parents – me included – are often quick to assume that their child will not even touch it, so they don't bother serving it. It's important not to assume. My son, all on his own, ate salad for the first time and loved it one day when he was about four-and-a-half. Instead of saying "Oh, you won't like it" (which I almost did!) when my son asked for a helping of salad, I gave him the benefit of the doubt and served him some. Much to everyone's surprise, he gobbled up the whole thing and now eats salad regularly. Know that kids' palates are ever-changing and what your child doesn't like one day (or for several years) might be their new favourite food the next day.

Labels are powerful

The label can easily enable the picky behaviour and decrease a child's self-confidence when it comes to eating and being adventurous at mealtime. What can drive this home even more is if your child has a sibling who eats really well and receives the label "good little eater" (in a child's mind, if he is not a "good eater", he must be a "bad eater", right?). When we compare kids by giving them a label, we are either praising them, or worse, belittling them, without even realizing it. Similarly, if parents or loved ones make presumptuous comments such as "oh, he won't eat that anyways" or "don't serve him that food-it will be wasted", it will make the child feel incapable of ever accepting or enjoying that food.

In order to help your child widen his palate, and more importantly feel capable of accepting new foods, it's important to make him feel confident in his eating abil-

ities; to gently encourage him to explore different foods at his own pace, and to remind him that even though he might not like a particular food today, he might like it the next time he tries it (or, in a few weeks from now). After all, we all have likes and dislikes, and these can change over time.

Our goal should be making our kids feel safe, secure and unjudged at the dinner table. This is key to their future eating success. Reassuring a child that it's normal not to like a particular food now, but that he will likely accept it in the future will increase the chances of him trying it again in the future with an open mind. And it will give him the confidence that he CAN like that food some day.

Instead of labelling your child, support, advocate for and encourage her.



Here are some common scenarios that you might find yourself (and

your child) in and how to respond in a supportive and encouraging way:

When your child doesn't want to come to the table for a meal:

"It's ok if you don't want to eat, but you still need to come to the table. Mealtime is also about family time."

If your child refuses to eat his vegetables:

"You don't have to eat them if you don't want to. You can see if you feel up to trying them again tomorrow."

If someone comments on your child's lack of eating or asks if he's a "picky eater":

"He's still learning to like that food. He'll get there in his own time. For now, he will eat the foods that he enjoys."

If your child thinks a food is "yucky" before even trying it:

*"It's hard to really know if a food is yucky before you test it out. If you don't feel ready to taste it yet, you could touch it or even lick it first". *Exploring foods in any way is a step in the right direction.*

If your child spits a food out after trying it:

"It's ok to try a food and decide that you don't want to swallow it. You were brave to try something new! Next time you might decide that you want to swallow it."

If he's not pleased with the types of foods served:

*"You can choose what you would like to eat on your plate. You don't have to eat everything". *It's important to always*

include at least one food that each child likes at meals so that there's always something for them to eat.

If your child says something like "Yuck, I hate mushrooms!"

"It's ok not to like mushrooms right now, but it's not ok to be rude. Instead you could say 'no thank you' when you don't want to eat something. Your tastes will change as you get older—you will probaly start to like mushrooms one day soon!"

Learning to accept and enjoy new foods is similar to learning to ride a bike, learning to tie shoe laces or learning to read. It takes time, patience and encouragement. Let's drop the picky eating label and encourage them, advocate for them and celebrate their mini milestones.

13

**THE PROBLEM
WITH
MEALTIME
PRAISE (AND
HOW TO
CHANGE IT)**



I've always thought that praising my kids for positive behaviour, kindness, sharing, etc., has worked well to increase the chances of continued positive behaviour. I can literally feel the pride beaming from my oldest son's face when I praise him for being extra nice to his sister or making his bed without being asked. But what I'm learning, is that although praise might work short-term, too much praise can backfire in the long run.

Without knowing it, you might be creating a "praise junkie"

Doling out too much praise, whether it's around food or something else can create a "praise junkie"- a child who relies too much on his parent's judgments of him rather than forming his own judgments. It can also cause a child to lose interest—they may become motivated NOT

to continue a positive behaviour, but instead to receive more praise.

When it comes to feeding kids—especially kids that tend to be “picky”—we might be tempted to offer praise when our child eats healthy, nutritious foods when they normally wouldn’t (or, for eating everything that they’ve been served). For example, I often over-hear parents say to their kids during or after a meal *“great eating tonight! You finished everything on your plate!”* or *“good boy for eating your broccoli!”*

Parents who praise their kids at the table are GREAT parents. They are using positive re-enforcement to encourage repeat behaviour—we all want our kids to eat healthy, right?!

But when we praise our kids for eating, what message are we sending?



Kids may translate messages of praise into:

“Mom is happy when I eat all of my food. I want to make mom happy all of the time, so I’m going to always eat all of the food on my plate” (the “listen to your tummy” message is thrown out the window)

“I’m a good girl if I eat my vegetables, so I must be a bad girl if I don’t” (your child will start to measure self-worth by how many vegetables she eats)

“If I eat more of my meal, Mom might let me have a treat afterwards” (this could easily lead her down a path of over-eating down the road).

Healthy dinnertime dialogue is crucial for nurturing a healthy relationship with food long-term. However, mealtime praise can be mis-interpreted by kids, can discourage mindful eating behaviours and can actually *enable* further picky eating behaviours. Saying “wow, you were a good eater!” actually places value judgements on what and how much our kids eat.

What’s more, is that offering praise at the table might shame a sibling who is struggling to try new foods. We don’t want to shame—we want to encourage. Amy McCready, a well-known parenting educator, says “praise, like sugar, can be tricky — and sometimes it shows up even where we don’t intend. For instance, when we label or compare our kids, we’re praising them, or worse, belittling them, often without realizing it.”

If your child—perhaps a picky eater—starts making small strides towards healthier eating, it’s tempting to want to jump up and down and scream for joy. Instead, try to stay calm, contain your excitement and encourage your child’s adventurous eating rather than praising it.

Instead of praising your child for eating, do

THESE 2 Things:

#1 Notice it:

Simply noticing the strides that your child is taking at the dinner table can go a long way in encouraging repeat behaviour and a sense of accomplishment. Using phrases such as “I noticed that you ate your peas tonight” or “I see that you’re enjoying your chicken” will let your child know that you notice his efforts and will give him a sense of pride and encourage him to do it again.

Saying “great job for eating all of your food!” sends your child the message that you’re evaluating him (if it’s not a “good job”, it must be a “bad job”, right?). Instead, simply noticing that your child is doing something positive will empower him to continue to do it without always expecting praise.

Instead of saying “great job for eating all of your dinner”, which may translate into “eating more=good boy” (you can see how this may create unhealthy habits later on...), saying “I’ve been noticing that you’re not always asking for snacks right after dinnertime anymore—you must be making an effort to fill your tummy at dinnertime” will register as “I CAN eat enough at meals so that I’m not always hungry afterwards”. I think that so often, we’re tempted to praise our kids for a desired behaviour because we so badly want them to repeat it. But showing

them that we NOTICE the behaviour goes a much longer way.



#2 Encourage rather than praise:

Encourage your child to continue being brave and exploring new foods (whether it's tasting, licking, touching etc.), even if he's making teeny tiny steps towards doing so. This will make him feel capable of going one step further in his exploration, without the pressure of actually swallowing a food right at the get-go. It gives him permission to gradually warm up to a food in a way that feels comfortable to him. This ultimately increases the chances of him accepting it later.

The difference between encouraging and praising is this:

When you encourage a child at the table, you are genuinely proud of him for taking a risk and trying a new food. You want to acknowledge his bravery and make

him feel capable of doing it again. On the other hand, offering empty praise such as “great eating tonight” or “good boy for eating your vegetables” means that you want him to do it again tomorrow. Real appreciation and encouragement is far more powerful than praise. Rather than offering a “good job!” for eating a certain food or a certain amount, genuinely acknowledge that the action was positive. This isn’t manipulation to get your child to do it again, but rather acknowledging it without conditions. We don’t want our kids to eat their greens to please us—we want them to actually learn to accept and enjoy them as part of a balanced diet (long term).

Encouraging our kids helps them to form a healthy inner dialogue. In other words, think of the words that you use as your child’s inner voice. We want our kids to learn things about themselves, and even repeat these phrases when we’re not around.

Try “that was brave of you for trying that red pepper strip—you must be proud of yourself”. This makes your child feel capable of doing it again and of being more adventuresome in general when it comes to food.

When it comes to quantity of food (let’s say, your child doesn’t often eat much at dinner, but you’re noticing that lately she has been eating more), encourage mindful eating by asking the question “how does your tummy feel?”, and encourage her to eat until she feels comfortably full.

14

**IS YOUR
CHILD'S PICKY
EATING
"EXTREME"?**

There's picky eating and then there's *picky eating.*



If you've been reading and listening to my lessons but feel as though your child's picky eating issues extend beyond what I've covered in this book, your child might be considered more of an "extreme picky eater".

Here are some red flags that you might want to watch out for:

If your child's picky eating...

- Affects their growth
- Affects their weight
- Affects their mood
- Affects family mealtimes day in and day out (in a drastic way)
- Causes a lot of worry/stress and anxiety for parents

- Causes anxiety or fear for the child
- Creates social isolation for the child

...it is likely time to seek help

Dealing with extreme – or even moderate – forms of picky eating can feel hopeless and isolating. In fact, research shows that children with severe forms of selective eating are much more likely to experience symptoms of social anxiety, anxiety, and depression. What's more is that moderate forms of selective eating can be associated with symptoms of separation anxiety and ADHD.

As we all know, it's very common for toddlers and young children go through a "picky eating" phase (or several) throughout childhood, and for the most part, this is no cause for concern and won't typically affect growth or nutritional status. However, it can easily be made worse (and enter the realm of "extreme" picky eating) if parents don't have the proper tools and strategies to use when feeding (such as the information found in this book).

If well-meaning parents intervene in an unhealthy way (perhaps bribing, forcing, hovering at mealtimes etc.), typical picky eating can easily escalate into more extreme forms of picky eating and psychological issues may follow.

If you're still wondering if your child's picky eating is typical or extreme? Remember...

Toddlers, preschoolers and even school-aged kids can have erratic and unpredictable appetites and eating tendencies. Every child isn't cut from the same cloth — even when it comes to siblings. Some kids will be pickier than

others and learn to enjoy foods at different times than others.

Typical eating may include:

- Eating a large amount at one meal and nothing at the next
- All of a sudden rejecting a food that was previously loved
- Going through a “food jag”: only asking for one or two foods for days or even weeks at a time
- One day eating a lot and the next day hardly eating anything
- Preferring carbohydrate-rich foods above all others
- Only eating one or two foods at a meal and then eating everything at the next meal

And if you’re worried about your child’s growth, here’s what’s considered normal...

When it comes to growth charts, they aren’t the be all and end all, despite what some health professionals may tell you—they shouldn’t be used as a judgment tool, rather as a tool to observe your child’s growth patterns over time.

Percentiles tell us how big or small your child is compared to a sample of children around the same age—not whether this is normal or not. We all come in different shapes and sizes, so it’s important to know that there is no “normal”. If you’re told by your family doctor or another health professional that your child is “failing to thrive”, make sure to get a second opinion, because this term can be inconsistently thrown around. The important thing is that your child is healthy, happy, active,

sleeping well and over the period of a week, eating a balance of nutrients.

So, what exactly IS “extreme picky eating?”



Katja Rowell, MD and Jenny McGlothlin, MS, SLP wrote a very helpful book called *Helping Your Child with Extreme Picky Eating* which guides parents through how to deal with more severe forms of picky eating. In it, they define extreme picky eating as “*not eating enough quantity or variety to support healthy emotional, physical, or social development; or eating patterns that are a significant source of conflict or worry*”.

Sound familiar?

Extreme picky eating isn't a one size fits all either. Your child may have been labeled a “problem feeder” or “selective eater” and you may not know exactly what that

means or whether it's accurate. Unfortunately, there isn't an official classification system for extreme feeding difficulties in kids, but the labels below can help parents to better understand their child.

What the Labels Mean

*(From "Helping Your Child With Extreme Picky Eating" by: Katja Rowell, MD and Jenny McGlothlin, MS, SLP)

Problem Feeder:

A child who eats fewer than twenty foods, drops food without adding others, eats different foods than the rest of the family, avoids entire food groups (like meat and vegetables), or becomes upset around new foods is often labeled a problem feeder.

Selective Eating Disorder:

Similar definition to problem feeder. Not officially a diagnosis in adults or children; increasingly used to describe a limited range of accepted foods and refusal of unfamiliar foods.

Food aversion:

May emerge after an unpleasant experience including illness, trauma, choking; also generalized fear or anxiety around food. Often occurs with selective eating disorder or among problem feeders.

Neophobia:

Fear of new things. Toddlers typically experience a phase of suspicion with new and even familiar foods, but extreme negative reaction to new foods may be labeled neophobia.

ARFID:

Avoidant/restrictive food intake disorder, previously called infantile anorexia. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) defines it as starting before six, lasting longer than one month, and characterized by an inability to take in enough nutrition orally for optimal growth, with a negative impact on weight and or psychological functioning. There are three ARFID subgroups: sensory, little to no appetite, and aversion.

Failure to thrive:

Inadequate physical growth. Often defined as weight below the fifth percentile; however, clinicians have used cutoffs at the tenth, fifth, or first percentile, or when growth slows significantly.

Feeding Disorder:

According to the American Speech Language-Hearing Association, describes problems gathering food in the mouth and sucking, chewing, or swallowing for appropriate intake.

Here's what you need to know if you think you have an extreme picky eater:

It is NOT Your Fault



It's important for you to know that you're not alone, and more importantly, it's not your fault. Although there are many factors that can contribute to extreme picky eating such as sensory processing disorders, oral-motor delays, being on the autism spectrum, a child being a "super-taster", the most important piece of the puzzle is the **interaction between you and your child at meal-times.**

That being said, you'll likely need to source out help from feeding therapists, dietitians, or other feeding specialists to help your child, but the dynamic between you and child is by far the most important. As the parent, it's important to arm yourself with the proper tools to help your child, and avoid advice and strategies that will make matters worse.

How Extreme Picky Eating Affects Your Child



Children who experience extreme forms of picky eating are affected not only physically, but emotionally and socially as well. Emotionally, a child may become upset, or cry at the sight of food, feel bad or self-conscious about his eating habits and feel inadequate or that something is “wrong” with him as compared to his peers or siblings. He may feel socially isolated and not want to participate in play-dates, go to friends’ houses or avoid sleep-overs. He may be ridiculed by peers or friends, and often over-observed and hovered over by well-meaning adults (parents, teachers etc.)

Extreme picky eaters aren’t trying to be “bad” or misbehave—they genuinely cannot eat in a typical way, for one reason or another—sometimes this reason will never surface, and that’s ok. You can still help your child without a clear diagnosis as to why she struggles with extreme picky eating.

How your child experiences extreme picky eating:

The following is a summary from Rowell and McGlothlin's book of common reasons—from the child's standpoint—of why eating is hard and why qualified help may be needed.

"Ouch!" Eating hurts:

If your child has trouble eating because of an underlying medical concern, it may actually hurt to eat. These concerns may include food, allergies, gastro-esophageal reflux, eosinophilic esophagitis (painful erosions in the esophagus), or severe constipation. Conditions that affect breathing or muscle movements such as congenital heart defects, chronic lung disease or muscular dystrophy can also impact a child's ability to eat comfortably.

"I just can't do it"

Because proper oral-motor control and jaw formation and function are necessary for eating, physical conditions such as cleft palate, malformations of the trachea or esophagus, dental issues, enlarged adenoids and tonsils, or even a tongue-tie can play a role in extreme forms of picky eating. Even subtle deficits such as moving the tongue in and out only, instead of up and down, restricts children to only eating soft mashed foods and not being able to progress to more solid textures. Rowell and McGlothlin suggest that parents seek professional help from a qualified speech language pathologist if they're finding that their child cannot chew with gums and early molars by about fifteen months.

“This food makes me feel uncomfortable”

Children with sensory integration challenges may be more sensitive to tastes and textures (they just feel more intense), or simply can't feel food in their mouth (this is where food pocketing may come in). Some children only feel comfortable eating foods with a uniform texture (only crunchy or only smooth), but this is also a fairly typical picky eating tendency for a developmentally-typical toddler. The sight or smell of certain foods can also turn a child off, likely due to a negative past experience.

“No! I want to do it my way!”

Temperament and mood can also affect the eating of extreme picky eaters. In their book, Rowell and McGlothlin describe that many of their clients feel and express intense emotions, and exhibit similar behaviours such as being highly verbal and intelligent; becoming easily upset and frustrated; and having a strong desire to figure things out in their own time and in their own way. They mention that many neurologically-typical children with extreme picky eating are often very independent, strong-willed and determined, are very attuned to the pressure that their parents put on them and may experience anxiety because of this. Food refusal can be seen in kids who are shy, emotional, and irritable, among other traits.

“This is scary. I don't want ___ to happen again”:

Children who experience trauma while eating — even kids with no history of picky eating — may become averse to food. This can happen after a choking episode (a

child is so fearful of choking again that he won't eat at all), or if a child has experienced coercive or forceful feeding (eg. a well-meaning and desperate parent forcing food into a child's mouth). Vomiting, aspirating (food moves into airway or lungs) or severe nausea can also render a child scared to eat.

What You Can Do for Your Child's Extreme Picky Eating



If you think your child's picky eating is extreme, and has started to affect her growth and consistently disrupt family meals, I suggest consulting with a pediatrician to request a referral to qualified speech therapist who specializes in feeding issues as well as a Registered Dietitian who has specialty training in pediatric feeding, feeding disorders and picky eating. In the meantime though...

The best resources:

The book "Helping Your Child with Extreme Picky Eat-

ing” written by Katja Rowell, MD and Jenny McGlothlin, MS, SLP ([amazon](#))

Rowell and McGlothlin also have a [facebook page](#) where they post helpful articles and resources for parents of extreme picky eaters.

Mealtime Hostage ([website](#) and [Facebook page](#))

Mealtime Notions ([website](#))

New Visions ([website](#))

My Munch Bug ([website](#) and [Facebook page](#))

The Food Chaining Book ([amazon](#))

15

**TOP SIX TIPS
FOR ENDING
MEALTIME
BATTLES
(FROM THE TOP
EXPERTS)**



I asked some of my favourite paediatric Dietitians and nutrition experts to weigh in on how they manage mealtimes at home with their own families (and what they recommend to their clients and readers) and to share their top tip on how to avoid mealtime battles. I chose my favourite six to share with you in this chapter, and have included each of their websites and in some cases books, so that you have lots of resources to turn to (along with my website, blog and Facebook page) when the course is done.

1. Eliminate Expectations

“I’ve found mealtime to be a lot less stressful for myself and my kids when take the “perfect family dinner” idea out of my mind. Instead, I take the spills, whines, and veggie refusal in stride, and know that by modeling healthy eating habits and making family mealtime a regular activity in our house, things will improve!”

Katie Serbinski, MS, RD, Mom of 2 (and one on the way!)

www.MomToMomNutrition.com

2. Structure is key:

“Structure is absolutely an essential ingredient to helping your child eat well. When we sit down for meals and snacks together at about the same time each day (most of the time, anyway!), children come to the table hungry and ready to try new foods. We can enjoy the time spent together, model relaxed and happy eating, and trust our kids to eat what they need at each meal.”

Alice Callahan, PhD and author of the book “The Science of Mom”

<http://scienceofmom.com/>

3. Use a “Learning Plate” for new food introduction:

“This plate sits in the center of the table, separate from the meal. It allows your child to see new foods, smell them, touch them, lick them, taste, chew, and even swallow them, if he chooses to do so. The Learning Plate may quell the pressure to eat a new food on the dinner plate and lets your child go at his or her own pace with trying new foods. Meanwhile, you’ve done your job of exposing your child to new food! Pat yourself on the back.”

Jill Castle, MS, RDN, registered dietitian, childhood nutrition expert and author of Eat Like a Champion and Fearless Feeding.

<http://jillcastle.com/>

4. The “YOU DON’T HAVE TO EAT” rule:

“My number one tip for avoiding mealtime battles is to have a you “don’t have to eat” rule along with including a safe food the child likes. Kids need to know that is also about family time and not just eating. When meals are not about what a child does or doesn’t eat, mealtime is more enjoyable for everyone (and kids eat better, too)”

If you could showcase my new book: *What to Cook for Dinner with Kids* that would be great. I help parents develop meals with kids in mind. I’ve attached a headshot. Let me know if you need anything else.

Maryann Jacobsen is a registered dietitian and creator of the popular blog Raise Healthy Eaters. She helps parents develop an effective dinner strategy in her new book *What to Cook for Dinner with Kids: How to Simplify, Strategize and Stop Agonizing Over Family Dinners.*

www.raisehealthyeaters.com

5. Don’t keep track of bites:

“Make long term goals a priority instead of counting bites at each meal. If your child has a healthy relationship with food, he is more likely to be of a healthy weight and eat a more balanced diet. Low pressure, pleasant family meals and structure in meals and snacks will help you lay down the important foundation that your child will keep building up on for many years to come. His eating personality and preferences in food may be quite different from yours but it is ok as far as he feels great about eating and likes participating in family meals.”

Natalia Stasenko MS, RD, CDN is a founder of 5 Day Child Feeding Bootcamp, an online coaching program for parents.

www.feedingbytes.com

6. Scrap the One Bite Rule:

“That’s what I did. While it was working well for my older son, my younger son took it as a challenge to his independence. It made him dig in his heels and just wrecked the mood at the dinner table. Now instead of saying “You have to take one bite” I simply suggest, “Why don’t you try a bite?” Usually my kids will try a bite—but sometimes they don’t, and that’s their choice. I don’t think the One Bite Rule is a one-size-fits-all. Not every child will react well to it. If that’s the case in your house, lay off the pressure. It’s so important that your kids feel welcomed to and accepted at the table, no matter where they are on their food journey.”

Sally Kuzemchuk, MS, RD, blogger at “Real Mom Nutrition”

www.realmomnutrition.com

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YOUR NEW TEN FEEDING COMMANDMENTS



I'm excited to summarize what I've taught you in this book by packaging the TEN MOST IMPORTANT tips into a top ten list that you can refer to as you go forward in raising happy, healthy eaters who grow to love a variety of foods.

Family meals (although often messy and chaotic) CAN be enjoyable, even when you have a picky eater. Here are the top 10 feeding commandments that will help to create some peace at the table, take pressure and stress off of you as the parent, and help your child learn how to eat mindfully and confidently. As a parent and child feeding expert, I swear by each and every one.

The Ten Feeding Commandments

1. I will do my job of feeding and let my child do her job of eating:

As a parent, your job is to prepare a variety of healthy foods at mealtime. You are also the one who decides when a meal happens and where your child will eat. In other words, it is your job to provide nutritious, balanced meals and snacks at regular and appropriate intervals, in a designated, distraction-free area, such as the family table.

Your kids get to decide whether or not they eat the foods you offer (some or all of them) and how much they eat. One of the hardest parts of feeding is letting your child do their job! But once you do, your life will be a whole lot

easier. The dinner table will no longer be a battlefield and the pressure will lift off of everyone.

2. I will respect my child's appetite fluctuations:

Your appetite changes from day to day and meal to meal. So does your child's! If you notice that your toddler or young child is full or not interested anymore, even after a few bites, don't force-feed or pressure him to keep going. Your child is respecting his hunger and fullness cues and so should you. Children are naturally very intuitive eaters, so as frustrating as it is to watch your gourmet meal go to waste, calmly remove the plate, store the food in a container and save it for later. Tomorrow your child may be famished and ask for seconds. Your child may have "hungry days" where he out-eats adult family members, and "full days" where he doesn't eat much at all. This is all part of normal eating!

3. I won't let feeding become a free-for-all. I will set a routine and stick to it:

Make meal and snack time fairly consistent from day to day. Your toddler will begin to know and expect when meal and snack times are. It will allow him to become hungry at meals (but not starving) and also know that if he doesn't finish his meal, there will be another chance to eat in a few hours. Because toddlers have small stomachs, they should be offered three meals and two or three snacks per day so that he is eating every two to three hours. Don't let eating be a free-for-all—it will exhaust you and your toddler will start to learn that he is in charge of timing. Remember, your role is to decide when

your child eats. He decides whether he is hungry and how much food to eat. Try a routine that works for your family.

4. I will let my child explore new foods, pressure-free:

Part of becoming comfortable with a particular food is exploring it. When you see your child is playing with, mashing up, or smearing food all over her plate, consider it a way for her to learn more about the food and become comfortable enough to put it in her mouth.

5. I will continue serving new or previously rejected foods without an agenda:

It may take up to 20 tries before your toddler accepts a new food. I know that it's tempting to skip right to the accepted and safe foods at meal times—trust me—but your child is not going to learn or have the opportunity to become comfortable with a new or previously rejected food unless it's introduced many times in a pressure-free environment. It's frustrating and may feel like a waste, but it's key to molding a balanced healthy eater. Try serving new or previously rejected foods with well-liked, safe foods—your child may warm up to them quicker this way.

6. I will model healthy eating on a daily basis:

It's important that your child sees you enjoy a variety of foods and that this is normal. Your actions translate into what your child deems as “normal” behaviour, and what

you say at the table (let's say, about food), becomes his inner dialogue. This is why family meals are key.

7. I will minimize distractions at mealtimes:

It's important for us parents to facilitate good eating habits for our kids. Just as munching in front of a screen (tv, iPad, cell phone etc.) takes our attention away from how much we're eating (and tends to create mindless eating habits), the same goes for our kids. Many well-meaning parents depend on screens or toys to distract their child into eating two or three more bites. This is counter-productive and can make the problem worse. Mealtime distractions work really well short term, which is why it's so tempting to use them, but unfortunately, screens and other distractions interfere with a child's ability to self-regulate and tune in to his or her appetite. Although it may be difficult (and you will receive protest), remove distractions from mealtimes and focus on family time. Enjoy each other's company and focus on internal hunger cues (i.e. "how full is your tummy now?") rather than how many bites your child can eat before the end of her show.

8. I will serve foods in a fun way with lots of variety, colours and shapes:

When it comes to plate style and design, what children like is drastically different from what is pleasing to your grown-up eye. Most adults prefer simple, uncrowded plates with food in the center, and not more than three components or colors on the plate. So, let's say a central mound of rice, topped with broccoli and a filet of salmon.

Kids are drastically different! Most kids embrace chaos, preferring foods positioned on the lower half of the plate (probably so they can see it and reach it), and prefer a rainbow of several colours and a wide array of different foods.

Vegetables and fruits come in virtually every color of the rainbow, and are the simplest, tastiest and most nutritious way to make a child's plate come to life. And, kids who are excited by the visual appeal of foods are more likely to taste whatever is served to them.

Go one step further and change the shape of vegetables and fruits. Use a vegetable peeler to make carrot or cucumber ribbons. Cut red peppers with scissors to make squares, triangles, circles and hearts. Or make a funny face with two cucumber slices for eyes, a grape nose, and a red pepper smile. Don't panic. You don't need to scour Pinterest to find the most creative plate out there—simple and creative changes can go a long way!

9. I will include my kids in grocery shopping, preparing and cooking meals (in an age-appropriate way):

Picky eaters are more likely to try foods that they've had a hand in choosing and preparing. Let them have input into the day's menu by asking them "would you like hamburgers or chicken tonight?" Avoid the vague "what do you want for dinner?" question as it's too broad. Give them two to three choices.

Take kids to the grocery store and have them choose a

fruit or vegetable that they want to try. Find a recipe and prepare it together. Or, visit a farmer's market or pick-your own farm – nothing entices kids to eat apples or strawberries as much as picking them themselves! If you have a green thumb, plant a garden and let your kids watch the fruits and vegetables grow, be harvested and turned into dinner!

10. I will be a good listener:

Ask your child to explain why she dislikes certain foods. You might be surprised to learn that it is the colour, texture, temperature, flavour or some other factor that you can alter. Ask her how you might make the food “yum-mier” and perhaps give some suggestions such as adding ketchup on the side, putting a dollop of ranch dip next to it, adding red confetti on top (dried cranberries), or simply separating one food from another. More on this in the next lesson!



- #1** I will do my job of feeding and let my child do his job of eating
- #2** I will respect my child's appetite fluctuations
- #3** I will set a meal and snack routine and stick to it
- #4** I will let my child explore new foods, pressure-free
- #5** I will continue serving new or previously rejected foods without an agenda
- #6** I will model healthy eating
- #7** I will minimize distractions at mealtimes
- #8** I will serve foods in a fun way with lots of variety in colours/shapes
- #9** I will include my kids
- #10** I will be a good listener

Thank you so much for committing to reading my book, *Turning the Tables on Picky Eating*. I sincerely hope that it's been helpful to you and that you have a new toolbox full of tips, tricks and strategies that will help you end

mealtime battles, create happier eating experiences and encourage your kids to explore new and previously rejected foods.