

Reframing Picky Eating

Supporting Your Eater in Training

All children are eaters in training. Some children go through stages where they find it hard to eat some foods or try new foods. Maybe they only want to eat certain foods or are easily distracted at mealtimes. This can be frustrating for parents, but is a **normal part of development.**

How to Support Eaters in Training

Trust that your child knows how much to eat

Children are born knowing how much to eat to support their bodies. Just like adults, children's appetites vary from day to day.

Don't stress about a skipped meal

Look at what your child eats over the whole week, not just one meal or one day.

Consider the setting

Bright lights, screens, and noise can distract children. Try dimming lights, turning off screens, and putting on calm music.

Create safe, no-pressure mealtimes

Bribing, cheering, and coaxing are pressure. Positive or negative pressure can hinder a child's ability to eat the amount that is right for them. Avoid pressure and create a relaxed environment for children to eat what they want.

Role model and eat together

Children learn to eat by watching you. Eat together to connect with your family. This can help your child build a positive relationship with food as they get older. For conversation ideas try [mealtime conversation cards](#).



Respect roles: Adult provides, child decides

- Adults decide **what** food is served, **when** it is served, and **where** their child will eat the food.
- Children decide **whether** they will eat the food (or not) and **how much** they want to eat.

Follow these roles to reduce stress around eating and help kids build lifelong eating skills.

Create a meal and snack routine

Offer 3 meals around the same time each day.
Offer 2 to 3 snacks a day and try to limit snacking all day long.



Offer new foods along with familiar foods

Offer new foods with at least one familiar food and choose a time when your child is usually hungry.

Be patient

Learning to eat takes time. Some children need to see a new food 20 times or more before they try it. Smelling, licking, or touching food can help. Try including new food with a favourite food.

Have fun with food

Involve children with food in different ways, such as shopping or setting the table. Have them try stirring mixtures or mashing foods. Plant a vegetable or herb garden and count seeds together.

Try making food in different ways

E.g. Scrambled eggs, boiled eggs, mashed eggs, eggs mixed with other foods.

Consider a vitamin supplement

If your child has a limited diet, consider a children's multivitamin. If your child does not eat meat, consider a children's multivitamin with iron. Tablets or gummies are a CHOKING HAZARD for children under 4 years, so if given, must be crushed or chopped.

When to seek help...

- Your child's mealtime behaviour is very challenging
- You are concerned about your child's growth
- Your child is not eating from 1 or more food groups for weeks

How to get help...

- Ask your healthcare provider to refer you to a dietitian
- Call or email a [HealthLinkBC Dietitian](#)



More information

[Picky Eating | Kelty Mental Health](#)



[Solve your child's feeding problems | EllynSatter](#)



[Helping Your 1-3 Year Old Child Eat Well | HealthLinkBC](#)



[Nutrition Resources | Island Health](#)

