



<http://www.caringforkids.cps.ca/healthybodies/FussyEaters.htm>

## When your child is a picky eater

Meals are important social times in a child's day. They help your child learn about food while connecting with family and friends. Parents play an important role in keeping mealtimes relaxed and enjoyable. Eating in a positive atmosphere helps children develop healthy attitudes about food and themselves.

### How much food should my child eat?

If your child is healthy and growing well you don't need to worry. Most children's appetite is right for their age and growth rate. It's normal for the food your child eats to decrease at around the age of 2. This is because her growth starts to slow down.

As a parent, your job is to provide your child with healthy choices at meal and snack times. It's then up to your children to decide what, how much and (sometimes) whether they will eat. Listening to their bodies—eating when they are hungry and stopping when they are full—will help children develop healthy eating habits for life.

Every child needs a balanced diet with foods from all 4 food groups—vegetables and fruit, grain products, milk and alternatives, and meat and alternatives. [Canada's Food Guide](#) gives information about what your child needs every day and the right portion size for your child's age. It's unlikely that your child will eat something from every food group at each meal, but try to get all the servings your child needs over several meals and snacks throughout the day. Because little children eat small portions, you might also want to consider dividing one Food Guide serving into smaller amounts.

### What if my child is a picky eater?

Young children often go through stages where they refuse to eat certain foods, only want to eat a small number of specific foods, or are easily distracted at mealtimes. Toddlers are learning to become their own person. One way that they show their independence is by self-feeding and choosing their own foods.

Just like you, your child will have days when he feels like eating certain foods and days when he doesn't. He might not even be interested in eating at every meal or snack time. Don't worry too much about what your child eats in one given day, but make sure that he eats a variety of healthy foods over several days.

It is common for young children to react negatively to certain foods. Some children are slow to accept new tastes and textures. Keep offering them to your child, she will

probably start to accept and enjoy them with time. Creating mealtime pressure or forcing your child to eat can actually cause him to resist eating.

### **Here are some tips to help:**

- Children enjoy deciding what to make for dinner. Talk to your child about making choices and planning a balanced meal. Include her on shopping trips for food.
- Let your child know about 10 or 15 minutes before dinner will start. This helps her shift her focus and settle when it's time to have a meal.
- Involve your child in meal preparation, for example, washing vegetables, pouring, stirring, and so on. It might help her be open to trying foods if she helps to prepare them. She'll probably also enjoy helping you set the table.
- Sit together at the table to eat and try to make mealtime social and fun. Most young children only have the attention span to participate for short periods, so be realistic about the length of your mealtimes. When the meal is done, take away the food.
- Avoid distractions like toys, books or TV during mealtimes.
- Offer a variety of healthy foods for meals and snacks. Most children eat what they needs, even if their appetite changes from day to day.
- Most young children like to copy the things that others do. Set an example by eating healthy foods yourself.
- Offer at least one food at every meal that you know your child likes.
- Give small portions of each food item at each meal. You can always offer more if she finishes everything on her plate.
- Give her the opportunity to make choices where appropriate. For example, let her choose between two different vegetables.
- Encourage your child to try at least a few bites of different foods at each meal.
- Serve drinks only after the main course. Too much milk or juice can affect your child's appetite.
- If she refuses certain foods or whole meals, let her make that choice.
- Stick to a rule that the kitchen doesn't reopen until the next planned snack or meal.
- Offer snacks and desserts that are from the Canada Food Guide. However, don't offer a snack too close to a regular meal time.
- Don't use food as a reward.
- Threatening, prodding, scolding, bribing and punishing can cause your child to resist eating even more. Praise and encouragement will help her develop food likes and dislikes.

### **How can I teach my child the importance of healthy foods?**

Don't label food by telling your child that chocolate bars are "bad" and apples are "good." It's more important to talk about "everyday foods" like vegetables and fruit, whole grain cereals and breads and "sometimes" foods like chips and candy that are eaten as special treats for once in a while.

### **Should I give my child vitamin supplements?**

Vitamins are important for your body to work well. But if your child is eating a healthy diet based on Canada's Food Guide, he won't need any extra vitamins.