



Cochrane Temiskaming Children's Treatment Centre Centre de traitement pour enfants Cochrane Temiskaming

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Strategies for Picky Eaters

Adjust the Feeding Environment

It is important to create a low stress/no pressure approach to eating. The pressures of HAVING to eat can create negative food associations for children, and ultimately work against your child learning to like new foods. Some simple changes that you can make to your mealtimes include:

- **Division of responsibility.** As the parent, it is your responsibility to choose what is being served, where you eat it, and when the meal or snack happens. It is the child's responsibility to choose how much they are going to eat.
- **Family meals:** eat your meals together as a family unit, as much as possible. Eliminate any screens, which serve as a distractor and result in you not truly engaging with your food or noticing/responding to your body's hunger cues.
- **Judgmental language:** try to remove all judgmental language from your interactions with food. This includes "good" foods and "bad" foods, rewards for eating (e.g. I'll give you a smartie if you eat all of your vegetables).

Structure and Routine

Provide a set meal and snack schedule. The routine of meals helps to increase appetite, which many picky eaters struggle to feel. Ideally, aim for 2.5—3 hours between each meal/snack. Ensure that you provide a balanced meal/snack with ample protein to ensure that your child remains "full" between meals.

Have set expectations during these meals, such as they must be at the table, and all family members must stay at the table. You may want to use a visual timer to help your child understand how long they need to be at the table, even if they choose not to eat. Appro-

priate times to expect a child to stay at the table vary, depending on age and developmental level; however, it should never exceed 20 minutes. If your child is currently only staying at the table for 30 seconds, start small and gradually build the expectation. Having the timer be visual can be very helpful.

Sample Meal Schedule

7:00 Breakfast
9:30 Snack
12:00 Lunch
2:30 Snack
5:30 Dinner



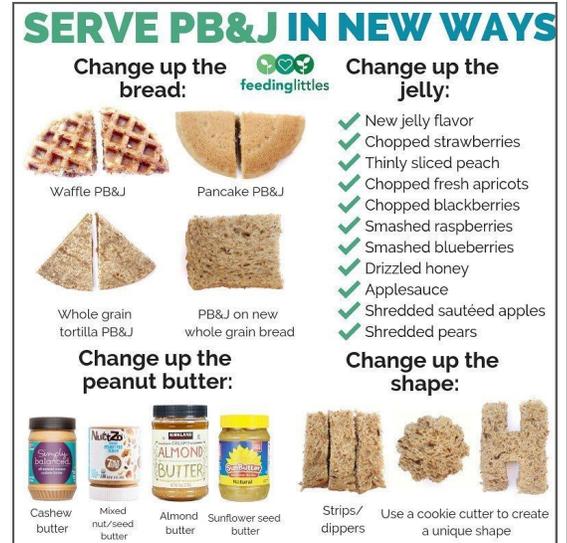
Offer a Variety of Foods

Always include at least **1 preferred food** on your child's dinner plate. This helps to make the meal less stressful on them than if they see a plate full of foods they don't like and shut down.

Adjust your serving sizes. The preferred food, if appropriate, could be half of their meal. With new foods, serve just a small portion (e.g. 1 tbsp) to limit the amount visually on the plate and decrease the amount they may feel overwhelmed by it.

Continue to **expose your kids to non-preferred foods!** It can take 15-20 (or more) exposures to a food before a child is willing to try it. You will never learn to like a new food, or to try a new food, if it isn't presented to you.

Work to expand your child's food choices by introducing preferred foods in new ways and slowly expanding.



Be Consistent

Changing a picky eater's diet can take time. If there has been a long history of stress and pressure associated with meals, it can take time to un-learn the behaviours associated with mealtime stress. Be consistent and implement the same language, strategies and expectations at every meal.

Underlying Causes

Your Occupational Therapist and/or Speech Language Pathologist can work with you to determine the underlying causes of your child's picky eating. They may include one, some, or all of the following:

- developmental picky eating (a normal phase that toddlers often go through!)
- Sensory
- Oral motor skills
- Physical challenges (e.g. GI issues, allergies, constipation)

The underlying cause of your child's picky eating will influence the approach used if additional intervention is required, beyond the above identified strategies.

RESOURCES

The following websites and/or social media sites (Facebook, Instagram) offer excellent evidence-based resources to assist you in supporting your picky eater.

Feeding Littles (www.feedinglittles.com ; @feedinglittles on Instagram)

Kids Eat In Color (www.kidseatincolor.com; @kids.eat.in.color on Instagram)

Your Kids Table (www.yourkidstable.com @yourkidstable on Instagram)