

# **My Child Won't Eat: Strategies to Deal with the Picky Eater**

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“My child has no appetite” is one of the most common parental concerns; I hear this on almost a daily basis. Here are some facts that may help to relieve your concerns.

Many children between the ages of one and five do not gain as many pounds as infants do. In fact, they usually gain only four to five pounds each year. Because they are not growing as fast as before, their appetite also appears to have decreased. That is normal, provided the child's growth and health are normal. Usually, as the child gets older, he or she will start to eat more.

Here are some strategies that a parent can try to reduce picky eating:

## **Teach your children to feed themselves as early as possible.**

Let your six- to eight-month-old children try to hold their own bottles. By 12 months, let them begin to use a spoon, and usually by 18 months they should be able to feed themselves well with a spoon.

## **Let your children be in charge of how much to eat.**

The most common reason for decreased appetite during mealtime is that the child is stuffed from having eaten many snacks and drinks between meals. Allow one or two snacks during the day, and limit juice to no more than four ounces a day and milk to 16 ounces a day. Encourage your children to drink plenty of water. Remember, if children are hungry, they will feed themselves. Do not force your children to eat. This will create more power struggles in the long run.

## **Provide a pleasant mealtime.**

Turn off the TV and involve your children in the family conversation. In a calm environment, children are more likely to try new foods. Do not extend the mealtime because your children have not finished what has been placed in front of them.

## **Set a good role model for your child.**

If you expect your children to eat a variety of foods, then everyone in the family should try to do the same.

## **Give children a lot of encouragement.**

Praise your children whenever they are willing to try a new food. A study has shown that a child needs to be exposed to a new food on the average 10 times before he or she is willing to accept it. Therefore, do not give up after two or three offers. Also, encourage your children to try at least one bite before saying no to a new food.

## **Be patient.**

Most younger children are going to be picky eaters, but their appetite will improve over time as they grow older. Do not worry too much as long as they are growing and healthy.

**References**

- Schmitt, B. O. *Your Child's Health*. New York: Bantam Books, Inc., 1987.
- Shelov, S. P. *Caring for Your Baby and Young Children: Birth to Age 5*, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition. American Academy of Pediatrics, 2001.