

Supporting Picky to Adventurous Eaters

Reduce the Stress

- Family mealtimes should be a time to reconnect after a long day.
- Reflect on how your mealtimes are going. If they are more stressful than you would like, consider a shift in the way you approach them using the tips in this guide.
- Offering deconstructed meals is the easiest way to serve family meals in a way everyone can enjoy without becoming a short order cook. You might serve a pasta casserole with the pasta, sauce and veggies each in their own dish.

Exposure. Exposure. Exposure.

Your child can't learn to tolerate, like, or even enjoy food if it's not being presented. Some children require hundreds of exposures before they even try a food. By varying those exposures, keeping it light and fun, and using different presentations we are supporting our child's learning about foods. For example, you can present cheese shredded, sliced, cut with cookie cutters, melted, etc. Apples you can present cut, sliced, whole, in apple sauce, in apple juice, even shredded.



Let's Redefine Our Roles

Parent's Role: choose what to eat, when to eat, where to eat.

Child's Role: Decide whether to eat and how much to eat.



As parents, it is still important to choose at least one thing per meal or snack that you know your child likes to eat. They might still choose not to eat it, but you have served them a "safe" food so your role ends there and your child's role picks up. This is a big concept that many families require time and support to adopt. I encourage you to learn more here:

<https://www.ellynsatterinstitute.org/how-to-feed/the-division-of-responsibility-in-feeding/>



Patience is Key

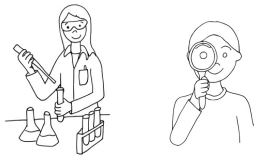


With parenting, we have the long game and the short game. The short game is survival mode. Doing what you need to do to get through that moment, day, or week. Sometimes you need to play the short game because you're sick and exhausted, or you just feel like you need a break. Maybe that means choosing the easy or preferred meal to just get through the day.

Long game is the planning mode. Setting your child and you up for longer term success. A carefully laid foundation is at the heart of the long game. With feeding, we want to set a foundation for our children to encourage them to find joy in mealtimes and be comfortable and safe to explore (and reject!) new foods. It's ok if you need to be in survival mode. When you have the energy and mindset though shift to the long game to start building that strong foundation.

Shift Focus From Eating to Learning

Often at meals we are so focused on what our child is (or isn't eating) that we forget our children are learners and budding scientists at heart. They are curious about why something looks the way it does, how something sounds when it breaks, or the intricate patterns they find. Food is an incredible medium in which to study, explore and break down. It doesn't always need to be about the consumption.



Include Your Child

Include your child in:

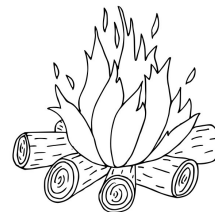
- choosing the menu for the week. Maybe they choose one meal for the week and you pick where it goes on the menu
- Helping you cook or prep the food
- Serving the food
- Cleaning up after meals
- Going grocery shopping



Have Fun!

Try fun twists on meals and snacks:

- Campfire cookout
- Buffett bar style
- Use fancy serving containers for everyday dinner
- Breakfast for dinner
- Deconstructed meals
- Kids choice dinner
- Picnic style movie night in the living room
- Kids serve the adults
- Family cooking night
- Outdoor picnic
- Charcuterie style dinner
- Grow a garden and eat straight from the garden
- Do a field trip to eat freshly picked berries or apples



Remember that none of these tips will be “the one magic trick” that gets your child to eat a wide variety of foods. It's a long and winding road with lots of peaks and valleys. Your job is cultivate an environment where your child feels safe to explore food and (one day) try it.

Feel Like you've tried it all and you need more support? Check out some of these free resources:

<https://peas.albertahealthservices.ca/>

<https://kidseatincolor.com/>

<https://yourkidstable.com/>

If your child has always been challenging to feed, gags at the sight of foods, eats fewer than 20 foods or is missing entire food groups, it might be worth seeking support from an occupational therapist and registered dietician.