

Feeding Fussy Toddlers



My toddler has become a fussy eater. What should I do?

Most experts say that “picky eating” is defined by a parent’s perception. In other words, your child appears fussy to you, but his/her behavior is probably just normal toddler behavior. Often toddlers do go through periods where they only eat a few foods. This is sometimes called a “food jag.” Children also may refuse to try new foods or refuse to try a food prepared in a certain way. Picky eating now and then is normal for most children. One good way to manage it is by not making a big deal out of it.

What are some tips for dealing with a picky eater?

Your role as a parent is to provide a variety of foods and a relaxed feeding environment. It is the child’s job to choose how much and what to eat. Be patient! Your child will probably outgrow this stage. Make sure to provide many different foods, and let your child choose what to eat. Offer new foods over and over again, even if he/she refuses to eat them. It may take 10-15 times of offering a food before a child will eat it. Don’t force your toddler to eat something he/she doesn’t want.

How do I know when my toddler has had enough to eat?

Part of developing healthy eating habits is for children to develop internal cues to know when they are done eating. Toddlers who are full may stop eating, throw food, become distracted easily, and ask to get down. Recognize these cues; allow your child to decide when he/she is full. Don’t force him/her to finish what is on the plate.

Won’t my child miss some nutrients if he’s not a good eater?

Studies show that picky eating, every now and then, does not affect nutritional status or growth. However, if your child has long periods of food jags or refusing foods, you may want to talk to a registered dietitian to assure his/her nutritional needs are met. Take your child for regular doctor appointments to have growth monitored. If you are concerned that your child is underweight or not growing properly, talk to your child’s pediatrician.

Will my child’s picky eating affect her health as she grows older?

It is not known if picky eating or food jags affect nutritional status or growth later in life. However, developing a healthy attitude toward food in the early years can affect eating habits for a lifetime. Offer a variety of foods and encourage your child to eat, but don’t force feed him/her to eat.

References

Bartoshuk LM, Duffy VB, Fast K, Green BG, Snyder DJ. Hormones, age, genes and pathology: How do we assess variation in sensation and preference? Available at: http://www.danoneinstitute.org/publications/book/pdf/food_selection_11_bartoshuk.pdf. Accessed December 29, 2007..

Steinberg C. Feeding disorders of infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. *BC Med J.* 2007;49:183-186.

Ellyn Satter Associates. Understand and parent your toddler. Available at: www.ellynsatter.com. Accessed December 29, 2007.