

Picky Eating

Mealtime doesn't need to be a battle. When parents follow Ellyn Satter's Division of Responsibility model, children grow into confident healthy eaters. Nearly every child goes through "food jags," when they will only eat a few foods repeatedly. Normally these jags last 1-2 weeks and then more foods are accepted again. It is also normal for children to eat very little on one day and a lot on the next. Parents and caregivers can support children by providing a steady family eating routine and setting up consistent feeding roles between adult and child.

The Caregivers' Role

What Food is Offered

The caregiver stocks the home with food and chooses what is served at meals and snacks. Serve at least one food that the child likes at each meal. Avoid cooking a separate meal for the child.

When Food is Offered

Offer a meal or snack every 3 to 4 hours. Offer only water between meals and provide milk, water or 100% juice at meal and snack times. **Don't let your child "graze" on snacks and drinks between meals. This will reduce the appetite.**

Where Food is Eaten

Serve all meals and snacks at the table. Avoid eating in front of the TV or with an electronic device. Eat together as a family at least 3 times each week.

The Child's Role

How Much to Eat

Your child decides how much they want to eat. We are born with the ability to listen to

our hunger. Allow your children to serve themselves or help decide on portions of each food.

Whether or Not to Eat

Some days kids are hungry and some days they are not. Most kids will eat enough to grow. If a child is made to eat when not hungry, they lose the power to listen to their body.

Other Tips

- Offer new foods when child is hungry. For example, set out cut up vegetables before dinner so kids can "snack" on these while they wait for the main meal.
- Be patient as your young child tries new foods. New foods can be scary.
- Many children need to be offered a new food 15 or more times before taking the first bite. Don't give up!
- Break down the meal to give more options. Stir fry can be served as separate bowls of cooked chicken, rice, carrots and peppers, pineapple, and sauce. Each person chooses which foods they want
- Remember, taste buds change.
- Set a good example. Keep different foods on the table and give the kids the chance to watch you eat it and to see, touch and taste the food without pressure.
- Add healthy foods in favorite recipes (for example, add blueberries to pancakes, pinto beans to taco meat, or grated carrots to meatballs).
- Involve your child in cooking and make it fun. Ask your child to pick out a fruit or vegetable for lunch, pick from the garden, or help with simple cooking tasks.

Websites

www.ellynsatterinstitute.org

www.healthychildren.org

Resources

- Book by Ellyn Satter
- Your Child's Weight: Helping Without Harming
- Child of Mine: Feeding with Love and Good Sense
- Secrets of Feeding a Healthy Family
- How to Get Your Kid to Eat...But Not Too Much.

When to Call

If you're worried that picky eating is causing health problems or a change in growth pattern, call your child's doctor.

Who to Call

If you are a UW Health patient and have more questions, please contact UW Health at one of the phone numbers listed below.

Nutrition clinics for UW Hospital and Clinics (UWHC) and American Family Children's Hospital (AFCH)
(608) 890-5500

Nutrition clinics for UW Medical Foundation (UWMF)
(608) 287-2770

You can also visit our website at

www.uwhealth.org/nutrition

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 10/2024 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Clinical Nutrition Services Department and the Department of Nursing. HF#518