

Handling A “Choosy” Eater

What would you do?

- Sara-Mei will not eat anything green – she even refuses a whole meal if one green pea appears on her plate.
- Santiago is interested in everything at the table BUT eating.
- Dillion gets upset when one food on his plate touches another.
- Mariffa will not eat anything but an orange or a banana; two days ago she would only eat peanut butter sandwiches.



“Choosy” eating is a child-size step toward growing up and showing independence.

In fact, what seems like a challenge to you may be an early step toward making food choices. A child’s “No” does not always mean no. What seems “choosy” may just be your child’s awkward first steps in learning to make decisions.

What appears to be “choosy” eating may instead be a smaller appetite.

Preschool-age children grow and develop at a slower rate than toddlers do. If left alone, most children become hearty eaters again when their body’s growth pattern requires more food for energy.

The best advice for you: Relax and be patient!

Learn how to handle eating challenges and how to avoid conflict. That way, your child will not learn to use food as a way to exert control.

Ten Effective Ways To Handle a “Choosy” Eater

- 1. Treat food jags casually** since food jags do not last long anyway.
- 2. Consider what a child eats over several days**, not just at each meal. Most kids eat more food variety than a parent thinks.
- 3. Trust your child’s appetite** rather than force a child to eat everything on the plate. Forcing a child to eat more encourages overeating.
- 4. Set reasonable time limits for the start and end of a meal** then remove the plate quietly. What is reasonable depends on each child.
- 5. Stay positive** and avoid criticizing or calling any child a “picky eater.” Children believe what you say!

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- 6. Serve food plain, and respect the “no foods touching” rule** if that’s important to your child. This will pass.
- 7. Avoid being a short-order cook** by offering the same food for the whole family. Plan at least one food everyone will eat.
- 8. Substitute a similar food –** if a child does not like a certain food; instead of squash, offer sweet potatoes.
- 9. Provide just two or three choices** not a huge array of food. Then let your child decide.
- 10. Focus on your child’s positive eating behavior** not on the food.

Check (✓) what you do already.

Circle ○ what you can try right away.



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