

# Where Do I Go from Here?

## Answers to Your Kids' Most Common Feeding and Eating Challenges

Reluctance to eat new foods and other picky eating habits are common during toddlerhood and the preschool years. This can be a big source of stress for parents, as we are always worrying about whether our kids are eating enough and growing appropriately.

The good news? For most children this is relatively short-lived and tends to get better with age as children enter the school years. And, in the meantime we have science-based recommendations that can help your child create healthy eating habits — no matter what your challenge!

### Help! At mealtime, my child eats:

#### TOO MUCH:

- ▶ Offer smaller, [age-appropriate kid-friendly portions](#).
- ▶ Help your children identify and listen to their hunger or fullness cues. Talk to your children about how their stomach feels before, during, and after eating.
- ▶ Take a 5- to 10-minute break before providing second helpings of favorite or less healthy items.
- ▶ Leave second helpings out of sight in the kitchen or on the stove
- ▶ Limit the number of unhealthy snacks and sweets in the house.
- ▶ Maintain a meal and snack routine to limit snacking all day long.

#### TOO LITTLE:

- ▶ Maintain a meal and snack routine to limit snacking all day long. Too much snacking throughout the day will result in kids not being hungry at mealtime.
- ▶ Let your children explore new foods by engaging all their senses (for example, looking, smelling, touching, and tasting.) If this is not appropriate for your culture, skip it!
- ▶ Let your children hold, wash, and help prepare foods. Even the youngest can help with food prep by washing and sorting foods.
- ▶ Tell your children a story or find picture books about healthy food, or play a game where kids close their eyes and guess the names of foods by touching, smelling, or tasting.
- ▶ Get creative! Give foods fun names like “green brocco-trees.”

#### TOO FAST:

- ▶ Help kids identify and listen to their hunger or fullness cues. Talk to kids about how their stomach feels before, during, and after eating.
- ▶ Try engaging in conversations during family mealtimes, like asking your children what the best part of their day was, for example.
- ▶ Encourage drinking water during meals.

#### TOO SLOW:

- ▶ Use praise to convey love and encourage trying new foods. Focus praise on willingness to try (“great job trying”) rather than the child (“you are a good boy”).
- ▶ Remove distractions like screens during mealtime.



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*Help!* I can't get my child to:

### SIT AT THE TABLE TO EAT

- ▶ Create routines around eating as much as your family's schedule allows and involve kids in implementing these routines.
- ▶ Be consistent in implementing routines. It takes time to develop new habits, but being consistent in always serving meals while kids are seated at the table will eventually result in the desired behavior change.

### EAT WITHOUT BRIBING THEM

- ▶ Use praise to convey love and encourage trying new foods. Focus praise on willingness to try ("great job trying") rather than the child ("you are a good boy").
- ▶ Reward making healthy choices with non-food rewards like giving stickers or playing a favorite game.
- ▶ Avoid offering food as an emotional tool or reward. This can set kids up to use food as an emotional support later.

### FINISH THEIR MEALS

- ▶ Start small. Offer small, [age-appropriate portions](#). And, when trying a new food, just offer a few bites to start. This is less overwhelming to young kids and results in less food waste.
- ▶ Avoid pressuring kids to finish everything on their plate at mealtimes. This helps kids learn to recognize and trust their hunger and fullness cues, while pressuring them to eat everything can interfere with self-regulation.

### EAT AT MEALTIME

- ▶ Maintain a meal and snack routine to limit snacking all day long.
- ▶ Limit the number of unhealthy snacks and sweets in the house.

### PUT DOWN THE SCREEN WHILE EATING

- ▶ Ask questions about their day.
- ▶ Tell stories.
- ▶ Remove all screens from the table or room where meals are served.



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### Help! My child is rejecting:

#### THE TEXTURE OF THEIR FOOD

- ▶ Experiment with cooking! Will your child not eat broccoli raw? Try steaming or broiling it, or top it with a sprinkle of cheese!

#### A FOOD THAT IS PREPARED A NEW WAY

- ▶ Try DIY toppings or mix-ins. For example, if your child prefers plain pasta, let them decide what they'd like to top it with: red tomato sauce or green pesto.

#### A NEW FOOD THEY HAVE NEVER TRIED BEFORE

- ▶ Pair a new food with familiar flavors. Sometimes offering new foods, like veggies, with well-liked dips or dressings or seasoning it in a familiar way will encourage kids to try new foods and may even help with acceptance.
- ▶ Start small. Even providing just a few small bites of a new food may be enough to get kids to like new foods while limiting wasted food.
- ▶ Engage all their senses. If your child is hesitant to taste the new food, first try exploring together what it looks, smells, or feels like.

#### THE HEALTHY CHOICE

- ▶ Make healthy choices easy by keeping healthy foods in sight, in reach, and easy to eat. For example, keep cut vegetables in the refrigerator for a quick snack and keep a bowl of fresh fruit on the kitchen counter.
- ▶ Offer first courses. Offering never-eaten-before vegetables as an appetizer at dinner gives kids the opportunity to eat healthy foods when hungry and without other competing food.
- ▶ Limit the number of unhealthy food in your home. It's easier to say "no" to food that isn't available in your home.



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*Help!* I'm not sure how to:

### ENCOURAGE TRYING NEW FOODS ON A BUDGET

- ▶ Use frozen vegetables. This reduces food spoilage and waste by allowing small amounts to be prepared and offered to kids at any given meal or snack.
- ▶ Start with small portions. Providing just a few small bites of a new food may be enough to get kids to like new foods while limiting food waste.
- ▶ Stock up on staples, like whole grains and beans that you can incorporate into a variety of meals.
- ▶ Buy seasonally. Produce in season may be cheaper due to supply.

### INVOLVE MY CHILD IN WAYS THAT WILL INSPIRE THEM TO EAT HEALTHY

- ▶ Let your children take charge (within healthy boundaries, of course!) by choosing which vegetable they'd like to try. This choice should be given before meal preparation and based on what is available in the home, so food is not wasted.
- ▶ Encourage your little ones to learn through all of their senses! During meal prep or playtime, allow kids to touch and smell their food to spark interest and improve comfort with new foods.
- ▶ Let your children hold, wash, and help prepare foods. Even the youngest can help with food prep by washing and sorting foods.
- ▶ When grocery shopping, allow your children to choose one new fruit or vegetable to try.

