

Picking Battles

with

Picky Eaters

5 ways to find peace with a picky eater

by EMILY MCMILLEN



After carefully planning a nutritious meal it can be frustrating when your little one won't even touch it with his fork. While you struggle to convince him to take just one bite he becomes more certain that he does not want it. Between his stubborn demeanor and your desperation a battlefield is created at the dining table. When it ends both of you are unhappy and you are discouraged.

Getting children to try new foods and eat their meal can be very challenging. Here are some ways to eliminate the battle, find peace during mealtime, and have your child eat.

lower your guard

One of the biggest problems with picky eating surprisingly is not the child. Jennifer Murphy, RD and nutrition counselor for families believes that the parent's concern can often lead to a problem because there is a misunderstanding that picky eating is a common trait among children. "The parents are so worried that they are not getting enough to eat, they don't understand it could be a phase," Murphy said.

The issue then is the pressure the parent may put on the child. The expectations that a parent

may have for their child to finish their meal can create a brunch battle field. "Mealtime can be a constant struggle between parent and child," Murphy said.

One way to diminish mealtime struggle is to follow a set of guidelines developed by Ellyn Satter, RD called the Division of Responsibilities. These "rules" are to teach parents exactly what their role is at the table. For instance, it is the parents responsibility to provide healthy meals.

However, it is the child's responsibility to decide what and how much they should eat. Using these guidelines can resolve table tension and make eating peaceful. "By following the rules it helps to create a happy mealtime and eliminates battles," Murphy said.

make it fun

The appearance of food is a big deal for picky eaters. Don't be offended if they don't jump up and down for a pile of veggies on their plate.

To make your child's food more appealing get creative! Cut their food into fun shapes and make a picture out of it. Use several different foods together for contrast in color. Your child will have a blast eating a fun picture that was made for them!



Division of Responsibilities

Parents:

Provide nutritious meals to be served, where it is served, when it is served.

Child:

Decides how much is being eaten and whether or not they want to eat it.

get them involved

Have you ever noticed that food tends to taste better when you have made it yourself? Kids feel the same way. If they are able to help with a meal they will be more likely to give it a taste as well.



Give your child a job in the preparation process. Have her rinse the veggies, stir the batter, or help measure out ingredients. Your little chef will be excited to contribute to the meal. Having your child help in the kitchen is a beneficial way to expose her to food. “Getting kids involved is an important part of teaching them about food,” Murphy said.

Not only will your child associate meal preparation as a special time with you but it can also be used as a learning process. “Use that time to talk about colors, counting, shapes, and the way the food feels,” Murphy said. Once your child becomes more familiar with different types of food they will be more likely to try it.

keep trying



Children can be persistent and stubborn when they have made up their minds.

Exposure is the key to open their minds to try new foods.

Even if the food is rejected during the initial exposure it is beneficial to keep on offering the food. “Don’t be scared to introduce new foods and don’t be discouraged if they don’t like it the first time. Continue to offer it,” Murphy said.

Reli Samonte, a RD who specializes in nutrition education, also believes that children may need many chances to try a new food. “Introduce a child to different kinds of foods and offer multiple times,” Samonte said.

It is important to remember that exposure is not a one way road. Try a new food with your child to increase the likelihood of acceptance. “If mom and dad are seen enjoying a fruit or veggie they child is more likely to enjoy it as well,” Samonte said.

sneak it in

One concern that parent’s may have with their picky eater is the amount of nutrients that are not being consumed. As hard as it may be, try not to worry about them suffering greatly from their behavior. “If the child is not underweight it may not be big deal,” Murphy said.

If you are concerned, a way to make sure their growing bodies are getting enough try sneaking in less desirable foods.

“I do sneaky things like... mixing avocado with cream cheese to put on his toast.”

“Sneaking in” doesn’t mean to deceive your child. Rather, it is showing him that you are mixing a new food with an old favorite. Chances are he will like it! “Combining foods together offers a variety and shows kids how to mix and match,” Murphy said.

Michelle Lemehaute King, mother of a 3 year old, mixes fruits and veggies in foods that her son already likes. “I do sneaky things like making muffins with carrots and zucchini in them and mixing avocado with cream cheese to put on his toast,” King said. Often times your child may just need a new way to try a particular food that is different from their first experience.

“Again, persistence is a key to unlocking the wall your child may put up to a food. “Even if I haven’t been very successful at getting him to try new things, I’m not giving up!” King said.