

5 Ways to Please Picky Eaters

Feeding a child is one of the most stressful parts of parenting for me. One minute my kids all enjoy a spaghetti dinner with homemade meatballs and green salad. The next minute that same meal is launched across the dining room table. Is this behavior picky eating? I'd like to think so. I also think there comes a time when children learn food is one of the only things they can control so they test their limits with Mom and the laws of gravity like Bill Nye the Science Guy. From what I've researched and witnessed in my own kitchen, handling picky eaters is just another step in the parent-child relationship most, if not all, families experience.

As a parent, you want your children to eat a variety of foods for good reason: it may lead to nutritious eating habits for them and stress-free cooking for you. So, what are you to do when one or more of your children start the oh-so-common picky eating behavior? Here are my 5 full-proof ways to please the pickiest of eaters:

- **Serve New Foods with Familiar.** Children are more likely to try a new food if it's served with something they already enjoy eating. For instance, if your child loves pizza, make a build your own pizza bar with extra vegetable toppings for them to choose from. I know my one son LOVES bananas, so I'll make sure he has a banana on his plate when I serve green beans or asparagus. Weird in my mind, but not in his!
- **Get the Family Involved.** Take your children to the grocery store [when you aren't pressed for time] and get them involved in the picking and choosing of different foods. When you get home, have them help you prepare a new recipe or food— better yet, have them help you name or create a whole new recipe from scratch!
- **Serve it THEIR Way.** If your child doesn't like their food touching, serve new foods on plates that have sections or compartments. If your child likes dips such as ranch or BBQ sauce, serve it alongside the new food, even if you think it's a weird combination. Or swap out the ranch for hummus or bean spreads. Don't let this tip make you into a short order chef though. This is only if you have their favorite dips and spreads on hand!
- **Eat it Together.** The best way to teach your child to enjoy healthy foods is to enjoy them yourself. Practice what you preach— oh and don't feel bad if you dislike peas and never serve them for dinner. I grew up in a home where my Mother despised bananas. I don't think I ate my first one until college. Now they are on my regular grocery list!
- **Respect Their Appetite.** If your child isn't hungry, don't force a meal or snack because it's mealtime for everyone else in the family. While it's important to stick to a mealtime routine [meals and snacks at the same time everyday], sometimes children aren't THAT hungry every day. However, this doesn't give them a pass for sitting down with the family while everyone else eats.
- **In the end, you need to do what works for your family.** I encourage you to cut yourself some slack, as handling picky eaters IS stressful. If your child is growing normally and has plenty of energy, he or she is most likely getting the nutrients they need each day. AND if not, feel free to send me an email and we can talk through some more picky eating strategies!



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