



Nutrition Concerns with Picky Eaters

Why Kids Are Picky Eaters

Some kids are picky from the start and others develop picky patterns for a variety of reasons. Research shows that over time most picky eater children get what they need nutritionally *when they are given healthy options*. The most important thing you can do as a parent to encourage healthy eating habits and make sure nutritious foods are part of your picky eater's daily fare is to be a good role model. The other key according to infant and child feeding expert Ellyn Satter is to remember the Division of Responsibility for feeding:

Parents are responsible for the what, when and where of feeding; children are responsible for the how much and whether of eating.

- Ellyn Satter MS, RD, CICSW, BCD

Remember that babies and young kids are still tuned into how much food their bodies need. Maintaining the Division of Responsibility in feeding and providing healthy options for your children everyday will help them grow normally, feel well, and maintain a healthy weight.

Physiological:

- Medical Conditions (ex. diabetes, food allergies, Celiac disease, etc.). If picky eating develops suddenly it is important to rule out a medical issue.
- Constipation – feel full or bloated, decreased appetite, painful bowel movements (this may also be related to dehydration), etc.
- Kids are sensitive to the **flavor and texture** of foods. They have a heightened sense of taste compared to adults and a natural preference for sweet foods.
- Children's appetite may decrease as the day goes on. By dinnertime kids may have eaten enough calories (between meals, snacks and drinks) and they are not hungry. Other times they are over-stimulated or tired from the day. Dinner is often not the best time to introduce new foods or re-introduce foods your picky eater claims not to like.

Emotional:

- Depression, crisis, stress, adjusting to new home/school/family member, etc.
- Little or no context in which to place new foods. Kids live in the now and cannot understand why they "should" eat something...especially for some future goal.
- Pressure to eat certain foods or amounts of foods may increase picky eating and create a power struggle. This may also create negative associations with foods.

Behavioral:

- Kids are naturally skeptical about new foods, can be erratic in their eating habits, and opinionated about their preferences.
- May not have role model (ex. parents eat separately, are picky eaters themselves, or have unhealthy attitudes toward food, etc.).
- Not everyone loves to eat!
- Picky eating means attention – *even if it is negative*.
- Child is given too many options (no division of responsibility in feeding).
- The myth that there are “kids’ foods” is accepted.
- Food acceptance process involves:
 - Putting food in mouth and taking it out again Seeing, smelling, touching, grasping a food prior to or in addition to actually tasting it (all part of *experiencing* a new food for babies and toddlers)
- 5, 10, 15, or even 20 times of trying *or experiencing* a food before it is accepted (for *all ages!*)

Shrek’s Favorite – Green Mac & Cheese

Shrek is a fave of many kids and making this green version of mac & cheese with Shrek’s stamp of approval may be just the ticket to get a picky eater to try something new. Of course if there is a better green character or fun name you can give this meal you can make it special for your family. For a quick meal use Annie’s Whole Wheat Shells & Cheddar combined with steamed and pureed green veggies (kale). The green color covers up the brown noodles somewhat allowing you to get more fiber into the meal and most of us could do with some more green veggies – especially kids.

Annie’s Whole Wheat Shells & Cheddar
2-3 cups raw kale, washed and chopped

- Prepare mac & cheese according to package directions.
- While noodles are boiling steam the kale until very soft.
- Puree the kale and add to the noodles along with the cheese, milk and butter.

Crunchy Chicken Nuggets

These baked nuggets are tasty and easy. You can also make a double batch and freeze the extra for a second meal. Organic ketchup is higher in some vitamins and special plant compounds found in tomatoes and organic ranch dressing is made without high fructose corn syrup making these are better condiments than their non-organic counterparts.

Preheat oven to 350°

1 pound boneless, skinless chicken breasts
1 cup plain yogurt
2 egg whites
2 cups bread crumbs (make your own using whole grain bread or buy pre-made)
Canola oil spray
Organic ketchup or ranch dressing for serving

- Cut chicken breasts into bite-sized chunks.
- Whisk yogurt and egg whites until mixed well.
- Place bread crumbs on a small plate.
- Dip each nugget in the yogurt mixture then coat with bread crumbs and place on a cookie sheet or baking pan.
- Lightly spray nuggets with oil and bake for 5-8 minutes then turn and bake until crispy (another 5-8 minutes).