



12 Parent-Tested Tips for Transforming Picky Eaters into Adventurous Eaters

Does your child refuse to eat anything that's not beige in color? Will he or she only eat things that start with the word "fried" or are loaded with sugar, salt and artificial flavors? Have they rejected all food groups except for the peanut butter and jelly group? Don't despair! You're in good company with many other parents. Believe it or not, most of us who have been "blessed" with picky eaters will find that as these kids (and their taste buds) mature, they actually become healthy, open-minded eaters, especially if we heed some of the advice that follows.

Because you're not the first (and certainly won't be the last) parent to give birth to a finicky eater, we've come up with some great tips to help you and your kids navigate these trying times:

1. Cook with your kids. They're more likely to eat foods that they've helped create. The meal will also seem a little less mysterious if they see and have some control over exactly what goes into it.
2. Try to sit down to meals as a family. Your children will be more likely to eat what the rest of the family is eating when you sit together.
3. Cut down on (or drop) snacks and juice between meals. If your kids aren't hungry at meal time, they're unlikely to eat much, especially new foods. If they do need snacks between meals, make sure they're healthy ones.
4. Consider the "one bite to be polite" rule to encourage kids to try new foods. Remember to shower them with praise if they eat more than one bite of the new food and give them positive feedback for being brave enough to try a new food.
5. Give your children opportunities to eat around other kids (especially older ones) and with other families. Kids are often more willing to try new foods in social settings, when "everyone else is doing it."
6. Introduce new foods when your kids are especially hungry. A great opportunity is when they have just finished playing outside or participating in a sport. They're particularly ravenous at these times and willing to "scarf down" whatever you put

in front of them. My kids also used to eat almost anything when we were driving in the car and there were no other options.

7. Keep a list of new foods your picky eater has been willing to try. Every time they try a new healthy food without rejecting it, make a big fanfare of adding it to the list! Another fun idea is an “I Tried It” box. Have your child decorate a shoe box and then write his or her new foods on index cards and put them in the box.
8. Keep offering new foods even if your son or daughter didn’t like them in the past. Taste buds mature and sometimes need multiple exposures to certain foods. If they still don’t like it, say something positive like “That’s okay, your taste buds are still maturing, so maybe you’ll like it when you’re older.”
9. Make new foods fun or funny. My husband Andrew got Solomon and Celia to eat green beans by telling them that if they ate one for each finger, they would be able to push him over with their strong fingers – and they did! I also remember convincing one of my kids to eat raspberries by having him put one on the tip of each finger and roar like a “Raspberry Monster” before he popped each one into his mouth.
10. “Sneaking-In” foods (as I often do in Scramble recipes by finely dicing them or pureeing them in a dish) can help you get additional veggies into your kids’ growing bodies and help their taste buds adjust to new flavors. I believe in a “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy when it comes to healthy foods.
11. But also, tell your kids why it’s important to eat healthy or “growing foods”. We often talk about what part of the body each food benefits, like broccoli and other green foods help our bones grow strong, carrots help us see better, and beans are good for our muscles. Our bodies need good fuel, not junky food, to keep us healthy and going strong.
12. Keep it positive, and don’t push too hard. Kids won’t starve themselves. I remember my pediatrician saying that kids seem to survive some days on “air.” If you get into a power struggle with your kids over food, they’re likely to win and a lot of the pleasure is also drained out of sharing meals.

We hope that some of these suggestions will help you navigate the twists and turns with your choosy eater. I know they can work, because my own formerly picky eater is now one of the most adventurous eaters I know! If you have any tips to share, let us know on Facebook, Twitter or at aviva@thescramble.com.