



When might picky eating be a problem?

Pizza, chicken nuggets, and macaroni and cheese. These are at the top of the list for children's favorite foods. Their preference for a few foods may lead us to call them picky eaters. This selective eating is a normal part of child development. As children gain more independence and can communicate their opinion, they let us know what they do or don't want to eat. But what if that is all they will eat? When might picky eating be a problem?

A wholesome eating pattern for children includes a variety of fruit and vegetables, grains, protein, and dairy foods. It might be time to reach out for help if a child avoids one or more groups, temperature, or texture of foods. It also might be time to reach out for help if they eat less than five foods.

Food selectivity may be linked with health or behavioral conditions like reflux, food allergies, constipation, sensory processing disorders, or autism spectrum disorder. Health-care teams are important for helping manage the condition and providing feeding support.

Some general tips for selective eaters include:

- Keep a schedule for meals and snacks. Children thrive on routine. Offering regular meals and snacks can prevent grazing in between. And it may help them come hungrier to mealtimes.
- Keep meals short and sweet. The sensory experience of meals can be overwhelming. Plan for meals to be less than 15 to 20 minutes. If things get stressful, take a break.
- Offer similar favorites. When offering new foods, try things that are similar in color, flavor, or texture to their favorites. This can make it more comfortable to try a new food.
- Start small. Offer small amounts of new foods. The child will determine whether the amount is as small as a pencil dot, ¼ teaspoon, or a spoonful.

You are not alone in feeding your child. If you have concerns or mealtimes feel stressful, reach out for help.

References

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