

OVERCOMING PICKY EATING

1. Encourage Trying New Foods

- **Family meals:** Same meal for everyone; include one “safe” food your child already likes.
- **Model it:** Let kids see you eating (and enjoying!) the foods you offer.
- **No pressure or bribes:** Offer, don’t force; remove uneaten food calmly.
- **Tiny portions & repetition:** 1-2 bites of a new food; re-offer 10 + times over weeks.
- **Fun presentation:** Colorful plates, cookie-cutter shapes, dips, silly names.
- **Give choices:** “Broccoli or carrots?”—both acceptable, toddler feels in control.
- **Kitchen helpers:** Wash produce, stir batter, plate food; pride = curiosity to taste.
- **Food “bridges”:** Pair less-loved food with a favorite (cheese on broccoli, beans in quesadilla).
- **Sticker chart:** Earn a sticker for tasting or even smelling a new food—keep it positive.

2. Picky eaters often miss out on key nutrients like iron, zinc, fiber, and B vitamins that are vital for growth and development. To fill these common nutritional gaps, try the following strategies:

Iron

- Beef meatballs
- Chicken Thighs
- Beans or lentils + vitamin C fruit
- Iron-fortified oatmeal
- Sneak in Spinach into smoothies

Zinc

- Chicken bites
- Cheese cubes
- Chickpeas/hummus
- Whole-grain cereal

Fiber

- Berries, pears, avocado
- Peas, sweet corn, broccoli (soft)
- Oatmeal, whole-grain crackers
- Bean dips/quesadillas

B-vitamins

- Eggs
- Dairy/fortified plant milks
- Whole grains
- Leafy greens in smoothies



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3. Sneak-In Strategies

Tip: “Hiding” foods can boost nutrients while you keep working on open exposure at meals.

- **Veggie purées in sauces:** Blend spinach into pesto, cauliflower into mac-n-cheese, carrots/zucchini into tomato sauce.
- **Smoothie power-ups:** Add spinach, avocado, cooked beets, or white beans to fruit smoothies—the color & fruit mask the flavor.
- **Meatball & burger boosters:** Finely grate onion, carrot, zucchini, or mushrooms into ground meat or lentil patties.
- **Baked-good upgrades:** Swap ¼–½ of oil/butter for pumpkin, mashed sweet potato, or black-bean purée in brownies/muffins; add chia or flax meal for fiber.
- **Pancake & waffle mix-ins:** Stir puréed fruit/veggies (banana, pumpkin, butternut **squash**) or Greek yogurt into batter; sprinkle hemp seeds for extra protein.
- **Creamy soups & dips:** Purée cooked lentils or white beans into soups; blend steamed cauliflower into hummus or queso dip.
- **Oatmeal stir-ins:** Fold in grated apple, zucchini, shredded coconut, or a spoon of peanut butter for healthy fats and nutrients.
- **Reveal gradually:** After a few wins, let your toddler help make the recipe so they learn what’s inside—build trust and acceptance.
- **“Veggie Sprinkles”:** in a food processor, add in a bunch of veggies and make sprinkles
- **Fresh pressed juices**

4. Toddler-Friendly Meal & Snack Ideas

- **Snack Plate (Mediterranean):** Turkey bites + cheese cubes + whole-grain pita + cucumber & grape halves.
- **Bean & Cheese Quesadilla:** Whole-wheat tortilla, mashed beans, cheese; serve with avocado & salsa.
- **Veggie Fried Rice:** Rice + scrambled egg + soft diced veggies; mild soy/ginger.
- **Lentil Soup & Naan:** Mild spiced lentils with soft bread; swirl in yogurt.
- **Hummus & Pita:** Hummus spread on pita wedges; cooked carrot sticks for dipping.
- **Tuna Salad “Boats”:** Tuna-yogurt mix with veggies on whole-grain crackers or cucumber cups + apple slices.
- **Breakfast Anytime:** Pancakes + Greek yogurt + blueberries or veggie omelet strips + toast.
- **Smart Snacks:** Yogurt parfait • PB on apple slices • Spinach-banana smoothie • Cheese & whole-grain crackers.
- **Popsicles:** Fresh squeezed juice
- **“Ice Creams”:** yogurt with fruit (then freeze it)

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5. Make Mealtimes Positive

- **Predictable schedule:** 3 meals + 2-3 snacks, limited grazing.
- Mealtime = 15-30 min, no screens, happy conversation.
- “You decide if/what/how much”—respect appetite, end meal without drama.
- No short-order cooking: one family meal; skipped meal = next planned snack.

6. Remember: Most picky phases pass. Stay calm, keep offering variety, and celebrate every tiny taste!

How long does the picky-eating phase usually last?

- **Onset:** Most children first show clear food selectivity between 18 months and 3 years as growth slows and independence blooms.
- **Typical duration:**
 - ⅓ – ½ of picky eaters stop within ~2-3 years.
 - In a large Dutch cohort, 32 % remitted within three years, and overall prevalence fell from ≈ 28 % at age 3 to 13 % by age 6.
- **By school age (≈5-6 yrs):** Most children have broadened their diets, though many still have a few “no-go” foods. A twin study found the highest fussiness around age 7, with a gradual decline after that.
- **Persistent minority:** About 4-10 % of children stay markedly picky well into later childhood; these are the “persistent” trajectory groups in several longitudinal studies.
- **Red-flag duration:** If extreme selectivity (fewer than ~20 foods, whole food groups refused) lasts longer than ~2-3 years and affects growth, daily functioning, or family life, it may signal a feeding disorder such as ARFID and merits professional evaluation.

7. When to Seek Professional Help

- Fewer than ~20 accepted foods, entire food groups refused.
- Poor growth/weight loss or extreme anxiety, gagging, vomiting around food.
- Suspected medical issues (reflux, allergies, oral-motor delay).
- Ask pediatrician; they may refer to a pediatric dietitian or feeding therapist.