

Handling A “Choosy” Eater

What would you do?

- Sara-Mei won’t eat anything green – she even refuses a whole meal if one green pea appears on her plate.
- Santiago is interested in everything at the table BUT eating.
- Dillion gets upset when one food on his plate touches another.
- Mariffa won’t eat anything but an orange or a banana; two days ago she’d only eat peanut butter sandwiches.



“Choosy” eating is a child-size step toward growing up and showing independence.

In fact, what seems like a challenge to you may be an early step toward making food choices. A child’s “No” doesn’t always mean no. What seems “choosy” may just be your child’s awkward first steps in learning to make decisions.

What appears to be “choosy” eating may instead be a smaller appetite.

Preschool-age children grow and develop at a slower rate than toddlers do. If left alone, most children become hearty eaters again when their body’s growth pattern requires more food for energy.

The best advice for you: relax and be patient!

Learn how to handle eating challenges and how to avoid conflict. That way, your child won’t learn to use food as a way to exert control.

Ten Effective Ways To Handle a “Choosy” Eater

- 1 Treat food jags casually** since food jags don’t last long anyway.
- 2 Consider what a child eats over several days** not just at each meal. Most kids eat more food variety than a parent thinks.
- 3 Trust your child’s appetite** rather than force a child to eat everything on the plate. Forcing a child to eat more encourages overeating.
- 4 Set reasonable time limits for the start and end of a meal** then remove the plate quietly. What’s reasonable depends on each child.
- 5 Stay positive** and avoid criticizing or calling any child a “picky eater.” Children believe what you say!

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6 **Serve food plain, and respect the “no foods touching” rule** if that’s important to your child. This will pass.

7 **Avoid being a short-order cook** by offering the same food for the whole family. Plan at least one food everyone will eat.

8 **Substitute a similar food** - if a child doesn’t like a certain food, maybe sweet potatoes, instead offer squash.

9 **Provide just two or three choices** not a huge array of food. Then let your child decide.

10 **Focus on your child’s positive eating behavior** not on the food.

Check (✓) what you do already.

Circle ○ what you can try right away.

