

The **ABC's** of Growing Healthy Kids

PICKY EATERS

Is Your Child a Picky Eater?

Does your child refuse green foods? Does he or she suddenly react to an all-time favorite food with “I don’t like this” or, simply, “No”? Are you concerned because your child will not eat vegetables?

The preschool years are characterized by bouts of independence. What appears to be “picky” eating may instead be your child’s early attempts to be assertive—a natural part of growing up. Before a picky eater gets to be a problem eater, you can use certain skills and techniques to ease mealtime struggles and encourage even the pickiest eater to try a few bites of new, different, nutritious food at each meal.

Many sources are available to help parents and caregivers cope with the young, opinionated eater, but no one answer will work all the time. Arm yourself with these tips for handling what may appear to be the “downs and ups” of child feeding.



Try one, two, or a few tips on a picky eater you know!

1. One step at a time.

Offer just one new food at a time. Let the child know if it will be sweet, salty, or sour.

2. A taste is just a taste.

Let your child decide the amount to try. A “taste” can be as small as $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon.

3. What goes in, may come out . . . and that's okay!

Recent studies indicate young children are more likely to try a new food if they have the option of not swallowing it. Show children how to carefully spit the food into a napkin if they decide they don’t want to swallow it.

4. If at first you don't succeed . . . try again.

Many young children must be offered a food 8 to 10 times before they will try it, according to recent research. Continue to offer a new food; don’t give up. Eventually children are likely to give it a try.

5. Be a role model.

Imitation is a powerful force in learning. If you want children to drink milk, for example, make sure they see you drinking milk as well.

6. Capitalize on “food-tasting” peers.

To encourage a reluctant taster, have him or her sit with friends or siblings who are good tasters when you introduce a new food.

7. Avoid the “short-order cook” routine.

Serve an unfamiliar food with familiar ones. This increases the likelihood that a child will taste the new food. But expect your child to eat the same foods as the rest of your family.

8. Color and texture make a difference.

Most children prefer bright colors and interesting textures. Many prefer plain foods that they can easily recognize.

9. Get children involved.

Even the most finicky eater is more likely to try a food he or she has helped prepare.

10. Remember meal planning and grocery shopping.

Whenever possible, include your child in planning, shopping for, and preparing some meals. This sense of ownership may stimulate interest and curiosity, and could help “sell” that first bite.

11. You can lead them to a new food . . . but you can’t make them eat.

Never force a child to try a food. Offer it, but if it is not eaten, simply take the food away and present it again at a different time.

12. Read stories about food to and with your children.

A child may be more likely to try a food that has been introduced in a story.

13. Most of all, relax!

Focus your attention on the positive aspects of your child’s eating behavior, not on your child’s food.

Prepared by Katherine Cason, associate professor of food science. Revised by Julie A. Haines, assistant director, Nutrition Links program.

Tomato biker illustration by Garo Goodrow

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Penn State College of Agricultural Sciences research, extension, and resident education programs are funded in part by Pennsylvania counties, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

This publication is available from the Publications Distribution Center, The Pennsylvania State University, 112 Agricultural Administration Building, University Park, PA 16802. For information telephone 814-865-6713.

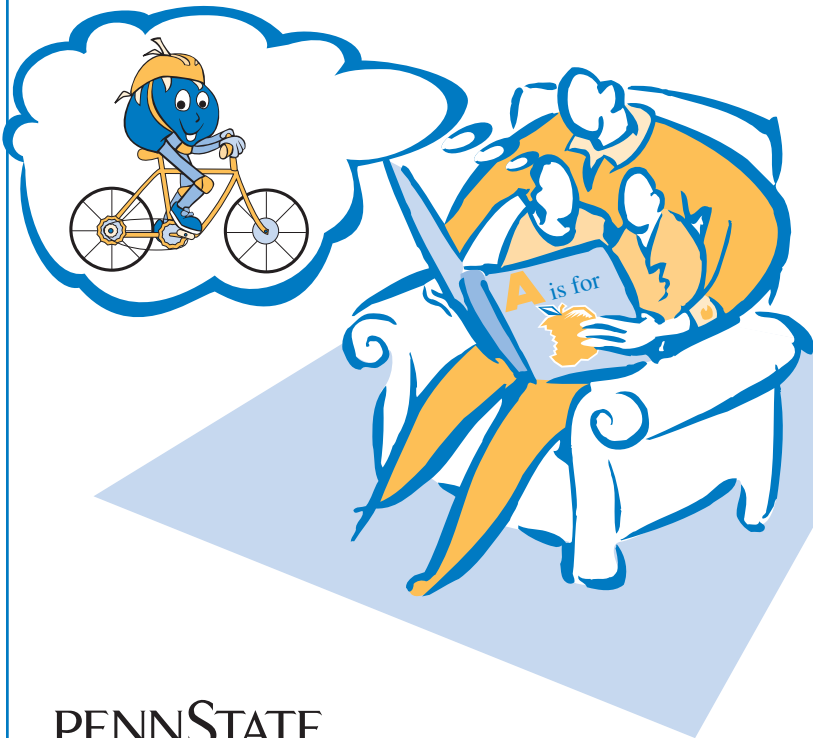
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Produced by Information and Communication Technologies in the College of Agricultural Sciences

CAT UK081 Rv10M6/04acg4400e



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