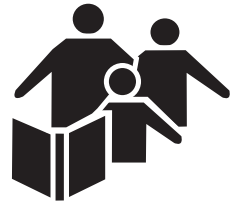


# Facing Food Challenges One Plate at a Time

*Even the healthiest meal won't do any good if a child won't eat a single bite. For a variety of reasons, some children are picky eaters. Sometimes children don't like certain textures, colors, shapes, or tastes. Some children simply refuse to try new foods. Whatever the reason for the food challenges at your dinner table, try some of these techniques to add variety and more substance to your meals.*



- Try varying foods within food groups. If your child refuses specific foods from one food group, try others from the same food group. For example, you could try
  - red, yellow, or orange vegetables instead of green vegetables.
  - lean beef, turkey, fish, or pork instead of chicken.
  - yogurt, low-fat flavored milk, or a milk and fruit smoothie instead of low-fat milk.
- Add additional nutritional value to some prepared dishes with extra ingredients. Add nonfat dry milk or nonfat plain yogurt to cream soups, milk shakes, and puddings. Mix grated zucchini, carrots, or puréed pumpkin into quick breads, muffins, meat loaf, lasagna, and soups.
- Serve a food your child enjoys along with a food that she has refused to eat in the past. Encourage alternating bites or even a “mixed bite” that includes a bit of both foods.
- Continue serving less desired food, not just the favorites. It may take many tries before a child likes it.
- Make mealtime fun. Cut foods into interesting shapes. Create a smiling face on top of a casserole with cheese, vegetables, or fruit strips.
- Model the eating behavior you would like to see your child have. Set a good example by eating well yourself. Ideally, eat at least one meal together as a family every day or try for three to four times per week.
- Try food masking—covering a new food with a condiment or sauce that your child is already familiar with and likes, such as cheese sauce, ketchup, or ranch dressing.
- Develop a routine by having all your meals about the same time every day and in the same place. Regulating your child's diet will ensure that he is hungry at meal times and will be more likely to eat the food presented to him.
- Get rid of distractions by turning off the television and other devices during meals, not allowing toys at the table, and minimizing table decorations (children can turn anything into a toy).

*Note: The amount of food and number of servings children need daily from each food group depends on their age and how active they are. Some parents worry because young children seem to eat small amounts of food, especially when compared with adult portions. Don't worry about how little a child eats. A child who is growing well is getting enough to eat. If you are concerned, talk with your child's doctor.*



For more information on child nutrition, see the Illinois Early Intervention Clearinghouse Web site at <http://eicclearinghouse.org>.

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