



# Early Learning Digest

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## When Your Toddler Doesn't Want to Eat

Many toddlers are picky eaters. There may be times when your child wants to eat a particular food again and again for a while, and then not want to eat it at all. So what can you do to encourage her to eat?

**Offer your child a variety of nutritious foods and let her choose what to eat.** You may want to serve something you know your child likes along with another new nutritious food. But try to let your child explore new foods on her own. Don't force your child to taste new foods. You may need to offer a new food several times before your child tries it.

**Be flexible with the meals you prepare to make sure your child gets a balanced diet.** For example, if you're making beef stew for dinner and your child will only eat potatoes and carrots, you may need to cook some of these vegetables separate from the stew so that your child will eat them.

**List the foods that you know your child likes so you can make sure she eats a balanced diet.** The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) website, [ChooseMyPlate.gov](http://ChooseMyPlate.gov),



offers good information about nutrition for children and adults.

**Set a good example for your child.** If your child sees you eating a variety of healthy foods, she will be more likely to give them a try.

If your child doesn't eat at one mealtime, you can offer a nutritious snack a few hours later. If your child doesn't eat the snack, offer the food again at the next mealtime. A child will usually eat at the second meal. With this approach, you can be sure that your child won't go hungry for too long, or have other problems associated with a poor diet.

Source: "When Your Toddler Doesn't Want to Eat," <http://familydoctor.org/familydoctor/en/kids/eating-nutrition/healthy-eating/when-your-toddler-doesnt-want-to-eat.printerview.html>, 2010.

If you have concerns about your child's growth and development, please talk to your child's health care provider or go to [www.helpmegrowmn.org](http://www.helpmegrowmn.org)

## Keep Foods Safe for Babies

When it comes to feeding your baby solid foods offer a wide variety of nutritious foods that are appropriate for your child's age, in a friendly and loving way. However, it is also important to ensure the safety of those foods. Here are some guidelines:

**Avoid honey and corn syrup.** These foods may contain botulism spores that could cause illness or death in infants younger than twelve months of age, although they do not cause problems for older children and adults.

**Reduce bacterial growth in food and keep your baby from getting sick.** Don't serve your baby commercial baby food unless the safety button in the jar lid is down and the lid "pops" when opened. Transfer an amount of food that you think your baby will eat to a dish. Feeding directly from the baby food jar allows bacteria from the baby's mouth to get into the food, where it may grow and multiply until the food is served again. If your baby wants a second helping, take more food from the jar with a clean spoon. Refrigerate food left in the jar and use within one to two days after opening. Throw away uneaten food left in the dish.

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## How to Get a Preschooler to Eat Healthy Foods

Do you have a preschooler who would prefer to eat junk food over healthy food? How do you change his behavior and help him develop healthy eating habits? Children who eat nutritious foods are likely to be healthier, have a lower risk of obesity, and be better prepared to learn in school.

So how do you raise preschoolers to appreciate and enjoy healthy foods? Below, are some ideas to get your family eating healthier and get your children excited about it as well.

- **Lead by example.** Teaching your children to eat healthy foods starts with you. Children eat more fruits and vegetables when they see their parents eat fruits and vegetables.
- **Provide nutritious food not just at meal time.** Have healthy snacks for your children to munch on in-between meals, like pre-cut and ready to eat fruits, veggies, and cheese for quick and easy access.
- **Use young children's natural curiosity and helpfulness to include them in planning and preparing a meal.** Have small jobs they can assist you with. This will build your children's self-confidence and encourage them to eat the foods they help fix. For example: you could ask, "What vegetables should we serve tonight, peas or green beans?" Let



them wash off the fruits or vegetables. Allow them to help you stir what you're making in the mixing bowl.

- **Include young children in serving the meal.** Ask for their help in setting the table, folding the napkins, getting the condiments on the table, and so forth.
- **Eat dinner as a family.** For younger children, eating dinner as a family provides an important routine. It offers them a sense of security and a feeling of belonging in the family. You can model important behaviors such as healthy eating, good social skills, and appropriate table manners.

When you lead by example and make healthy eating choices more available, your children are more likely to follow along.

Source: "How to Get a Preschooler to Eat Healthy Foods," by Lydia Lorang, Dept of Human Development and Family Studies, Auburn University, <http://www.extension.org/pages/66309/how-to-get-a-preschooler-to-eat-healthy-foods#.Vfw6ENIo58x>.

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**Microwave foods carefully.** Baby foods can be slightly warmed, served at room temperature or cold. If warming baby's food, spoon a single serving from the original container into a dish that is microwave-safe. Heat food for only a few seconds. When it reaches a lukewarm temperature, stir to prevent "hot spots," and let "rest" for at least 30 seconds. Check that the temperature is lukewarm before feeding. Feed the baby with a clean spoon and throw away leftover food.

Source: "Introducing Solid Foods to Infants," <http://www.clemson.edu/extension/hgic/food/pdf/hgic4102.pdf>.

## Test Your Knowledge!

- 1) T F If your child sees you eating a variety of healthy foods, he will be more likely try them.
- 2) T F Eating dinner as a family offers children a sense of security and a feeling of belonging in the family.
- 3) T F Feeding directly from the baby food jar is safe and cannot harm your baby.

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Answers: 1) T, 2) T, 3) F