

## Selective Eating

Your child may be picky about the color, texture, smell or taste of their food. They may also have difficulty with trying new foods. These issues are common for many children, especially in the preschool years. If your child has plenty of energy and is growing, they are most likely eating enough to be healthy. Below are some ideas to inspire kids to explore new foods.

### Before the Meal

- Let your child pick a new food from the grocery store.
- Ask your child to help unpack the grocery bags – every interaction with a new food helps.
- Include your child in meal preparation using the new food that they picked at the store. Children can wash produce, stir foods, or arrange foods on a platter.
- Involve your child in the pre-meal routine: clean and set table, help serve food to family, etc.
- Plant fruits or veggies in the garden or in pots with your child, and involve him or her with the care/growing process from planting to harvest. Prepare these foods together and serve at a family meal.

### During the Meal

- Have fun! Keep the mood positive so that your child feels happy and comfortable.
- 75% of your child's meal should be preferred foods, and 25% can be a new food to explore.
- When meals are planned this way, you should not need to prepare another meal for your child if they reject this meal that is 75% preferred food.
- Allow your child to choose between two new foods that the family is eating that he or she can explore. Provide a small portion to avoid overwhelming your child.
- Explain that you do not expect your child to eat the new food, but you do expect them to explore it.
- Encourage exploration by demonstrating ways to interact with the new food.
  - Poke with utensil or finger, cut with knife or cookie cutter, smash, smell, lick, bite, etc.
  - Praise any and all interactions with new foods.
- Discuss the aspects of the new food with your child that you think he or she would enjoy.
- Encourage playful interaction with the new food, or assign it a silly name.
- Do not give up if your child does not accept a new food at first. This is normal. Continue to introduce at later meals when the family is eating this food.

### Meal Scheduling

- Provide 3 meals and 2-3 snacks per day.
- Meals should be 2.5-3 hours apart, and provided at consistent times daily.
- Only provide water between meals and snacks – no grazing on bites of food or sipping on other drinks between scheduled meal and snack times.
- Provide food first at meals, and then liquids at the end of meals.
- All meals and snacks should occur at a table, ideally with others who are eating.

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## Food Chaining

Food chaining is a gradual method of increasing the variety of foods that a child will accept by introducing new foods that are very similar to foods that the child already accepts in a stepwise fashion.

### Example Food Chaining Progression:

Animal Crackers are currently accepted. The goal is to bridge to peanut butter and jelly sandwich:

Graham crackers → Teddy Grahams® → shortbread cookies → peanut butter cookies → club crackers → cheese with crackers → Ritz® crackers → Oyster crackers → Saltine crackers → cheese quesadillas → Saltines with cheese or peanut butter → toast with peanut butter or toasted cheese → peanut butter and jelly sandwich

## Books on Selective Eating

- How to Get Your Child to Eat but Not Too Much by Ellyn Satter
- Child of Mine by Ellyn Satter
- Just Take a Bite by Ernsberger & Stegen-Hanson
- How Does Your Engine Run? by Williams & Shellenberger
- Poor Eaters: Helping Children Who Refuse to Eat by Joel Macht, PhD
- Dr. Paula's Good Nutrition Guide for Babies, Toddlers and Preschoolers by Paula Elbirt, MD
- Food Fights by Laura A Jana, MD and Jennifer Shu, MD
- Food Chaining: The Proven 6 Step Plan to Stop Picky Eating, Solve Feeding Problems, and Expand Your Child's Diet by Cheri Fraker, Laura Walbert, Sibyl Cox, Mark Fishbein
- French Kids Eat Everything: How Our Family Moved to France, Cured Picky Eating, Banned Snacking, and Discovered 10 Simple Rules for Raising Happy, Healthy Eaters. By Karen Le Billon

This handout was provided to assist you with your child's nutritional needs. All nutrition plans should be individualized by working with a registered dietitian. Please get a referral for "Nutrition Clinic" from your Primary Care Provider. Then call (858) 576-1700 ext. 5999 to book an appointment with a dietitian.