



# ANTI-BRIBING STRATEGIES FOR PICKY EATERS

Take a deep breath, and don't worry! What if you could be assured that your child will get the nutrition they need without you going crazy just by starting with small steps? We all want our kids to eat nutritious foods and hope they naturally gravitate towards choosing these foods even when they are not at home. Unfortunately, we need to remember that forcing and bribing children to eat certain foods rarely instills a desired result or behavior.

Most children enter a picky eating phase at some point, and it tends to begin at the age of 1 or 2. This is the point where children start to express opinions and may love a food one day and dislike it the next.

## Consider these tips to help your picky eater consume a balanced diet!

**1 Respect your child's desire for food, and allow them to ask for less or more.** It's important to not force them to eat a meal or snack or to clean their plate. This could kindle a power struggle over food with your child and a negative behavior such as anxiety with meals or sensitivities with feelings of hunger. It is important to encourage your child to stay at the table for mealtime, though, even if they are not hungry. Not doing so could promote picky eating behaviors.

- 2 Involve kids, and recruit their help!** There are many ways to do this: include kids in prepping meals, setting the table, cleaning up after dinner, passing and serving the food, and while grocery shopping (where they should help you select nutritious foods). For older children, skills such as cooking, like those taught in high school classes, have been highlighted in *The Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior* for their role in developing teens into adults who eat better and choose more fruits and vegetables.
- 3 Encourage kids to play with and explore their food!** Talking about a food's color, shape, aroma, taste, and texture can help them become familiar with foods and increase acceptance. School or at-home taste tests are an innovative way to introduce foods to kids.
- 4 Teach children about the healthy foods available to them at school and at home.** New research suggests that explaining why a (maybe less acceptable) food is good can get kids to try healthier foods such as fruits, vegetables and beans. Offering foods with age-appropriate nutrition messaging for children resulted in twice as much food being consumed!



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**5 Offer meals and snacks with a variety of nourishing and tasty foods at regular times throughout the day.**

This will offer plenty of opportunities for a child to eat, even if they chose to not eat much at a meal time.

**6 Ensure a pleasant environment while children eat.**

Children usually are more open to new foods when everyone surrounding them is calm and comfortable about eating. If at home, make sure the television and electronic devices are off during meals. This will help your child focus and encourages family time.

**7 Make it fun!** Create food art, cut foods into shapes, or add bright colored foods to dishes. For older children, serve breakfast or a non-traditional item for dinner or add a fun dip or sauce with veggies. Children also love to create smoothies using bright-colored fruits and vegetables.

**8 Yes, we know this will be difficult, but don't offer dessert as a reward!** Using dessert as a bribe relays the message that dessert is the best food offered and will increase the child's desire for it. Having dessert a couple nights a week is not a bad thing, and there are ways to make your dessert a healthy option.

**Children's eating habits don't change overnight, but using these strategies can help shape positive eating habits over time. As children grow, whether they eat, how much they eat and what they eat is their responsibility, and we want to equip them to make good choices throughout their lifetime.**



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