

## How to improve your Picky Eater's Diet

If you have a child who is a fussy eater, you have probably read lots of parenting articles on the topic already. The answers may have ranged from "typical toddler behavior" to "control issues".

But from an **occupational therapy perspective**, things can look a bit different.

Many kids are fussy eaters because they are struggling with **sensory processing issues**.

These issues can affect a child's eating habits in different ways:

- a child who is **over-sensitive to sensations** in the mouth (also called oral defensiveness), may **gag** on solid food and avoid strongly flavored food. Food which is lumpy can also cause gagging.
- some kids are **oversensitive to the smells** of food, and seek out bland food as a result.
- a child who is **sensory-seeking** may dislike bland or soft food and only eat food which is very crunchy, textured or highly flavored.
- a child who has a **sensory-based motor disorder** may struggle with the **coordination skills** needed to use a spoon or knife and fork, and may avoid food that takes too much effort to eat.
- some children with low muscle tone or **poor oral motor coordination** may struggle to chew and swallow, and may therefore prefer food which does not need to be chewed.

## Questions to ask yourself about the environment

1. How loud is it where you eat?
2. Lighting?
3. Visual distractions?
4. Temperature?
5. Smells?

## Picky eating

- It can start emerging around one year
- Child has a short list of foods available to him/her
- Child refuses to try new foods and want to eat favorite foods over and over

## How to reduce Stress at Mealtime

- Support seating at mealtime
- Do not force children to eat, trick or punish

- Always offer a preferred food at every meal, even when something new is introduced
- Introduce one new food at a time, over a period of time, and do not ask your child to eat a plate full of new food
- Introduce a new food in a fun setting
- Meals and snacks should be 2 hours apart
- Avoid grazing
- Give a choice when possible
- Maximum 30 minutes to eat the meal
- Rule of thumb: Parents choose what to eat, the child chooses how much to eat.

If your child is doesn't like handling food, or struggles to use utensils, then try using [eating aids](#) like these funky spoon holders, or even feeding her new foods yourself.



### Get your kids involved

- Making grocery lists
- Looking at flyers, cookbooks
- Putting away groceries
- Cooking together in the kitchen

### TIPS FOR MEALTIME

#### Seating:

Ideal seated posture: 90-90-90 degrees

Use a footrest or stacked phone books  
Use the stick plastic like dycem under feet and bottoms



#### Highchairs:

Adjusts to fit your child's exact height



### When they won't Sit Still

#### 2 usual reasons:

- Seeking vestibular stimulation
- Poor postural stability

#### Solutions:

- Vestibular activation as a 5-10 minute warm up for mealtime
- Heavy work activities
- Deep pressure and weight- using a weighted animal or pad on the lap

## Warm-up activities

- Jumping on a trampoline
- Playing on a scooter board
- Swinging
- Sliding
- Carrying something heavy in the house
- Tug of war
- Animal Walks

## Oral Motor and Sensory Games

- Have your child suck thicker drinks through a straw (yogurt, milkshakes, fruit smoothies)
- Blow bubbles, whistles, party blowers, and musical wind instruments
- Blowing contest with feathers, cotton balls, tissue paper, or other light material
- Blow out candles in various ways. If child does not have good lip protrusion, hold chin in hand and push lips together into pucker. Then have child breathe out forcefully to blow out one candle. Gradually increase distance and number of candles.
- Licking food from a flat surface like a plate or lid helps with mouth and tongue coordination.

Food-based sensory play is a great way for picky eaters to explore foods in a new, less threatening, way!

### Food Face Plates

Why not try making silly faces with your food? Here is a DIY plate idea that allows you to use food to decorate the face. You can also skip the dish and just use the food itself to create your designs. Try making animals too!



<https://www.adventure-in-a-box.com/diy-food-face-plate-for-nutritious-beautiful-meals/?fbclid=IwAR0GgeKPYC1TUpYnMOMLQWOZyq5bnUOBBGn2kbYQYGL0COGmRwm5iEkRbl4>

### Food Sensory Bins

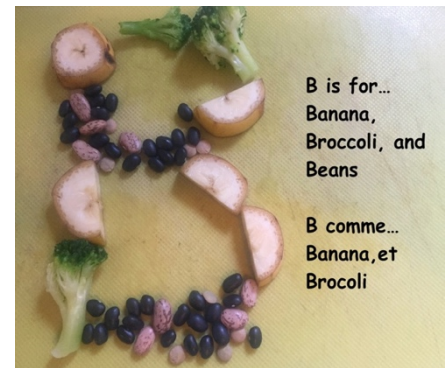
Try making sensory bins, but with food! This mom came up with some pretty creative ideas. Try to include foods your child doesn't like, and don't be afraid to get messy!

[https://mommyevolution.com/15-fun-food-sensory-bin-ideas/?fbclid=IwAR3PFpPV1hz07ZZ4it2ezbAK-EXyDH3b4edaWJDPcFL\\_qtOZp98sYvLFfn4#\\_a5y\\_p=4113395](https://mommyevolution.com/15-fun-food-sensory-bin-ideas/?fbclid=IwAR3PFpPV1hz07ZZ4it2ezbAK-EXyDH3b4edaWJDPcFL_qtOZp98sYvLFfn4#_a5y_p=4113395)



## Food Alphabet

- Materials: various food that start with the letter you've chosen
- Create letters of the alphabet using foods that start with that letter



For more information :

<https://www.ot-mom-learning-activities.com/dealing-with-picky-eaters.html>

<https://www.ot-mom-learning-activities.com/muscle-tone.html>

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