



# Unlock the Potential of Food

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## Say Goodbye to Picky Eating!

Do you have a picky eater at home? If mealtimes are a struggle, try these tips to help your child develop better eating habits. You can use these tips for a child of any age. It's never too late to start having a healthier and more enjoyable mealtime.

If you are not the only one who prepares food for your child, make sure all caregivers follow the same tips to get the best results. This includes babysitters, siblings and grandparents!

### The PARENT and/or caregiver's job is to decide:

- **WHAT** food and drinks are served at meals and snacks. Make only one family meal. Do not offer your child other options or their favourite foods if they refuse the family meal. Plan healthy balanced meals using [Canada's Food Guide](#).
- **WHEN** food is served. Offer meals and snacks at the same time every day. Your child will learn when to expect food to be served and it will help them come to the table feeling hungry. Your child is more likely to try new foods when they are hungry at mealtime.
- **WHERE** food is served. Children eat better when the family eats at the table together. Limit distractions, like screens, at mealtimes. If you need help planning meals, try our [Family-Friendly One Week Sample Meal Plan](#) found at [UnlockFood.ca](#).

### The CHILD's job is to decide:

- **IF** they are going to eat. Your child will eat if they are hungry. Don't worry – your child won't starve themselves! If they are hungry they will eat even if their favourite foods are not in front of them.
- **HOW MUCH** they are going to eat. Trust that your child knows when they are hungry or full.

### Top 10 tips for picky eaters

1. Plan family mealtime. Eat meals at the table as a family. Do not offer food while your child is playing, watching television or walking around.
2. Be a role model. Your child will eat better and be more willing to try new foods if they see others at the table eating the same foods. Family members, including older siblings are important role models for healthy eating.

3. Eat at regular times. Offer three meals and up to three snacks at regular times each day. Offer only water between meals and snacks. This will keep your child hydrated and will also make sure that they don't fill up before mealtime.
  - What if my child won't eat? If your child refuses to eat at snack or mealtime, offer food only at the next scheduled time. Stick to this rule even when your child refuses supper and has to wait until breakfast. If children eat less at one meal, they will make up for it and eat more at the next meal.
4. Promote happy mealtimes. Your child will eat better if they are enjoying mealtime. Children are more likely to have a happy mealtime if you don't pressure them to eat.
5. Avoid distractions. Meals and snacks should be served away from distractions like the television or computer. Mealtime is for eating and interacting with the family. Do not have toys at the table or on your child's tray. Leave toys, books, television and music for playtime before or after meals.
6. Prepare one meal for the family. Make sure you offer food in the correct texture and size of pieces for your child. Remember it is the parent or caregiver's job to offer the food and it is your child's decision whether they will eat or not. Your child will be more willing to try new foods if they know they will not get their favourite foods when they refuse dinner.
7. Listen to your child. Trust that your child knows when they are hungry and full.
8. Don't pressure, praise, reward, trick or punish. Children who want to be independent will not eat well if they feel pressure. Allow your child to decide if or how much they will eat from the foods offered. Trust that they will eat if they are hungry.
9. Try, try again. Continue offering new foods even if your child has said no to them before. Offer these foods on different days, at different meals and in different recipes. It can take as many as 15 times for a child to try a food and like it. Don't give up!
10. Limit mealtime. Allow your child a maximum of 30 minutes to eat the meal. After this time, put the food away and let your child leave the table. Offer food again at the next scheduled meal or snack time. Extending mealtime too long will not make your child more likely to eat and does not create a healthy and happy eating environment.

## Try some new recipes that the whole family will love:

[Mini mushroom omelettes](#)

[Breakfast dumplings](#)

[Date and oatmeal pancakes](#)

[Super easy chicken parm](#)

[Baked potato medley](#)

[Green meatballs](#)

[Thai curry turkey](#)

[Energy balls](#)

Recipes can be found at [UnlockFood.ca](https://unlockfood.ca).

## How can a dietitian help?

A [dietitian](#) will make sure your child is getting important nutrients like protein, fibre, iron and calcium that your child needs to grow and be healthy. Your dietitian will make suggestions on how to boost the nutrition of the foods they are already eating and give you a plan on how to introduce new ones. They can also help you plan balanced school lunches and help you with reading labels. [Connect with a dietitian today!](#)

## Bottom line

Remember, it is the parent/caregiver's job to decide which foods are offered, when they are offered and where they are offered. It is the child's job to decide what to eat from what is offered and how much. If you follow the tips in this article, you should start to see improvements in your child's picky eating over time. If you have tried all these tips and are still having difficulty, a dietitian can help.

Visit [www.NutritionMonth2023.ca](https://www.NutritionMonth2023.ca) for more on how to connect with a dietitian and for trusted food and nutrition information.