

Picky Eating: Tips for knowing when to get professional help

As adults, we have had years to get to know what we like to eat so it's easy to forget what it's like to be to a young child just starting to explore food flavors and textures.

What moms and dads consider "picky" could be quite normal for a young child. But does "picky" eating ever signal a deeper "problem"? Possibly. Here are several guidelines to help you identify the difference between common picky eating and possible feeding problems:

Signs of Picky Eating <i>(common phase in childhood)</i>	Signs of Problem Feeding* <i>(may need a referral to a feeding specialist)</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Child will eat 30 or more foods ▪ Foods avoided during a food-jag are accepted again after 1-2 weeks. ▪ Child will allow new foods on the plate and usually can touch or taste a new food. ▪ Child eats at least one food from most all food texture groups (liquids, thick liquids, soft foods, crunchy foods, creamy yogurt-like, etc.). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Child eats fewer than 20 different foods ▪ Foods avoided during a food-jag are not eaten again after 2 weeks. ▪ Child cries or "melts down" when presented with new foods. ▪ Child refuses entire food groups or food texture groups. ▪ Child almost always eats different foods than the family. ▪ Child gags, chokes, or vomits when eating.

**Adapted from SOS Feeding Solutions, STAR Center, Dr. Kay Toomey, 2010 and DSM-V criteria.*

Red flags

Sometimes a child's refusal to eat is rooted in one or more physical and/or emotional issues. If you see one or more of these red flags, talk to your child's doctor about getting specialized attention:

- Failure to grow or gain weight
- Difficulty chewing or swallowing
- Food or liquids getting into lungs
- Pain with feeding
- Vomiting or diarrhea linked with eating
- Developmental delays
- Some lung/heart problems like cystic fibrosis or congenital heart disease
- Extremely selective- only a handful of food
- Forceful feeding by caregiver
- Sudden rejection of food after choking or traumatic event
- Anticipatory gagging
- Refusal to eat or fear of fat
- Excessive weight loss or insistence on maintaining very low weight
- Vomiting or excessive exercise after eating

Peacehealth.org/picky-eaters

Source: Jendy Newman, RD, CDE & Tok-Hui Yeap, RD, CSP
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Healthy Eating Assessment Worksheet

List foods your child usually likes or will readily eat most days:

Meats/Proteins (*chicken, peanut butter*)

Veggies/Fruits (*carrots, bananas*)

Grains/Cereals (*pasta, bread*)

Dairy (*milk, cheese*)
