

Is your child's picky eating driving you crazy?

When it comes to dinnertime, you know all the tricks your child may play. Whether it's the old "sneak-it-to-the-dog" routine, the "cringe and shudder" act, or the crossed arms combined with the "you've got to be kidding" look, you know they all mean the same thing: Your child is not thrilled about what's on his or her plate.

When this happens, don't fret. Dietitians at the Center for Healthy Weight and Nutrition at Nationwide Children's Hospital have the answers you need to deal with even the pickiest of eaters.

This month, Sizing it Up sat down with Nationwide Children's dietitian Lori Mooney to discuss kids' picky eating habits.

Q. What's the first thing parents of a picky eater need to know?

A. Parents need to realize that food isn't something that should start a battle. You shouldn't use food to punish, bribe or reward your children. Using foods as a reward, especially sugary ones, makes a child want those foods that much more.

Q. Do you have any tips for kids who refuse to eat veggies and fruits?

A. A great way to get kids to eat their vegetables is to blend them and then put that puree in a sauce or soup. As for fruits and even some vegetables, a great option is to put them in smoothies.

Q. What about picky eaters who constantly want to eat the same types of



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food every day, such as macaroni and cheese?

A. It's not necessarily a bad thing for kids to want one type of food, as long as it's reasonably healthy. The important thing is to offer that favorite food only once a day and to offer it with other foods. Also, try to do different things with that food. You don't want a child to eat only the same food at every meal, no matter what it is.

Q. What do you mean when you say parents should try to do different things with the food a child is attached to?

A. For instance, if a child is partial to breakfast foods, it's okay to have breakfast for dinner. In this case it's important to get a little creative to ensure that your child is getting the proper nutrients. Cook fruits or vegetables into pancakes or waffles for instance, and lose the powdered sugar.

Q. What if a child simply refuses to try a new food?

A. Kids eat when they're hungry, so if they won't eat something, don't force it. Plus, you may have to offer a food up to 15 times before a child tries it. Don't be discouraged if a child doesn't eat something. Offer new foods in small amounts and be patient and persistent, but not forceful. I think as parents, we sometimes offer too much to our kids. That can be overwhelming for them.

Q. What's the most important thing parents should know about feeding a child who's a picky eater?

A. It's a parent's responsibility to provide food for their child. You control what,

when and where food is provided. This means not letting kids take over the eating habits of the whole family. Families need to have a meal schedule and stick to it.

Q. What if your child is consistently not eating?

A. If you're concerned about your child's eating habits, if you think those habits are affecting his or her growth and development, or if you think certain foods are making your child ill, consult your primary care physician.

Lori Mooney is a registered and licensed dietitian at the Center for Healthy Weight and Nutrition at Nationwide Children's Hospital.

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