Handling A “Choosy” Eater

What would you do?
• Sara-Mei will not eat anything green – she even refuses a whole meal if one green pea appears on her plate.
• Santiago is interested in everything at the table BUT eating.
• Dillion gets upset when one food on his plate touches another.
• Mariffa will not eat anything but an orange or a banana; two days ago she would only eat peanut butter sandwiches.

“Choosy” eating is a child-size step toward growing up and showing independence. In fact, what seems like a challenge to you may be an early step toward making food choices. A child’s “No” does not always mean no. What seems “choosy” may just be your child’s awkward first steps in learning to make decisions.

What appears to be “choosy” eating may instead be a smaller appetite. Preschool-age children grow and develop at a slower rate than toddlers do. If left alone, most children become hearty eaters again when their body’s growth pattern requires more food for energy.

The best advice for you: Relax and be patient! Learn how to handle eating challenges and how to avoid conflict. That way, your child will not learn to use food as a way to exert control.

Ten Effective Ways To Handle a “Choosy” Eater

1. Treat food jags casually since food jags do not last long anyway.
2. Consider what a child eats over several days, not just at each meal. Most kids eat more food variety than a parent thinks.
3. Trust your child’s appetite rather than force a child to eat everything on the plate. Forcing a child to eat more encourages overeating.
4. Set reasonable time limits for the start and end of a meal then remove the plate quietly. What is reasonable depends on each child.
5. Stay positive and avoid criticizing or calling any child a “picky eater.” Children believe what you say!
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6. Serve food plain, and respect the “no foods touching” rule if that’s important to your child. This will pass.

7. Avoid being a short-order cook by offering the same food for the whole family. Plan at least one food everyone will eat.

8. Having your child help with the meal makes it more likely they will eat. (tear lettuce, stir, measure, pour)

9. Ask your child which they would like: pears or apples, broccoli or carrots.

10. Focus on your child’s positive eating behavior not on the food.

Check (✓) what you do already.
Circle ○ what you can try right away.