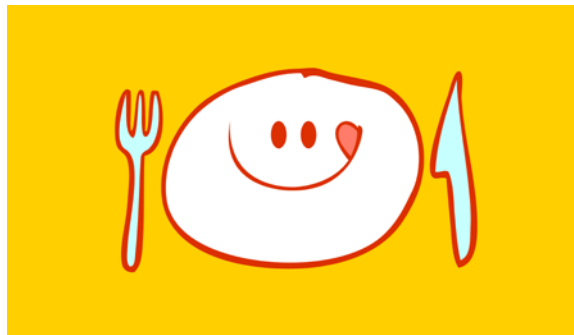


Still a picky eater?

Helping children who are selective eaters.



What is selective eating?

Selective eating is when children only eat the foods they prefer. This often limits their intake of a balanced diet. Selective eaters may also be called “picky” or “finicky” eaters. A child’s selective eating can range from mild to extreme.

Mild selective eating can include children who limit their eating to the foods that they prefer. These foods may be salty, sweet or a certain colour or texture.

Selective eaters may also eat smaller portions than expected. These children will often not eat foods from all of the 4 food groups in “Eating Well with Canada’s Food Guide”. The 4 food groups are:

- Milk and Alternatives
- Grain Products
- Vegetables and Fruit
- Meats and Alternatives

A copy of “Eating Well with Canada’s Food Guide” is available on Health Canada’s website: www.hc-sc.gc.ca

When does my child's selective eating become a problem?

Selective eating is a problem when it becomes extreme. This happens when your child's limited eating results in health or social problems. Selective eaters will often not eat foods from all food groups.

How do I tell if my child selective eating is a problem?

A good guideline is to watch and write down what your child is eating over one week. Check to see that your child includes foods from the 4 food groups in "Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide".

Eating foods from the 4 food groups will help to make sure that your child is meeting his or her nutrition needs. If not, the suggestions in this handout may be enough to make improvements in your child's eating.

If you do not see an improvement in your child's eating after using the ideas in this handout, please call your family doctor for more help.

If your child is not gaining weight, losing weight or not growing, call your family doctor.

What are some of the other reasons for selective eating?

There may be other reasons why your child is eating selectively. These include physical reasons such as having problems chewing or swallowing. He or she may have a medical condition that is affecting their eating. If you are concerned call your family doctor.

Also, call your family doctor if you notice changes in your child's behaviour such as depression or withdrawal, or if he or she has emotional outbursts.

How I help to improve my child's food intake?

Here are some tips for parents and caregivers:

- Make new foods available to your child but do not force him or her to try them. Instead, give gentle encouragement and allow your child to try on his or her own.
- Children may need to see a new food a number of times before they are comfortable trying it. Try putting the new food on your child's plate along with other foods you know your child will eat.
- Try to build on your child's intake by offering variations of the food they already enjoy. For example, if he or she likes peanut butter, try other types of sandwich spreads such as cashew butter. Another example is if your child likes apples, try firm pears. The same can be done if your child prefers specific textures or colours of foods.
- Some children may do better at trying new foods in social situations. It may be helpful to ask your child to try a new food at the daycare, school or with their friends.
- Prepare your child for meals by serving them at the same time every day. Discuss how you expect them to behave at the table. This may include turning off the TV, using cutlery and sitting at the table during a meal.
- Encourage your family to eat meals together. Make sure the room is fairly quiet and does not have a lot of activity.
- Offer small meals more frequently. Include healthy snacks between meals.
- Be a role model for your child when trying new foods. Show your child how good it tastes.
- Pick your battles. Avoid unnecessary struggles over your child's food intake.
- Praise your child when he or she tries a new food. Say things like, "Wow – you have had 3 new meats this week." or "I love that we can now have strawberries together."
- When eating out, bring foods that your child will eat. Choose a table in a quiet area and sit next to your child.
- Learn about "Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide".

Programs at Hamilton Health Sciences

- **Pediatric Eating Disorders Program**

This program helps children and adolescents with eating disorders and more serious forms of selective eating.

Phone: 905-521-2100, ext. 73497

Fax: 905-521-5056

- **Feeding and Swallowing Clinic**

This program helps children with feeding and swallowing problems.

Phone: 905-521-2100, ext. 75013

- **Children’s Exercise and Nutrition Centre**

This program is for children ages 4 to 16 who are overweight.

Phone: 905-521-2100, ext. 77967

Websites

- National Eating Disorders Information Centre www.nedic.ca
Call 416-340-4156 for information about eating disorders.
- Dietitians of Canada www.dietitians.ca for information about children’s nutritional needs.
- Health Canada www.hc-sc.gc.ca for a copy of “Eating Well with Canada’s Food Guide”.
- Canadian Health Network www.canadian-health-network.ca for information about nutrition and health.

Books

- Help Your Teenage Beat an Eating Disorder (2005) by J. Lock and D LeGrange.
This book provides information about eating disorders (Anorexia and Bulimia).
- Child of Mine: Feeding With Love And Good Sense, 3rd Edition. (2000)
by Ellen Satter.
- Secrets of Feeding a Healthy Family (1999) by Ellyn Satter.
- How to Get Your Kids to Eat But Not Too Much (1993) by Ellyn Satter.