

Picky, Picky, Picky: How to Deal with a Picky Eater – and When It Might Be Something More

OSF HealthCare Newsroom

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It's not unusual for children – especially toddlers and preschoolers – to have their favorite foods, often refusing to eat anything else. Picky eating is a common behavioral problem in young children, with nearly a quarter of preschool children going through this phase, with most outgrowing it.

But what can parents and caregivers do to encourage children of any age to try a broader range of food?

SOT Dr. Sandeep Gupta – Pediatric Gastroenterologist – OSF HealthCare Children's Hospital of Illinois

(Kids are picky sometimes. And obviously you want them to have a well-balanced diet and the food you cook. So I would say use your judgment. Be an authoritative parent not authoritarian. Tell them this is what we cook, this is what we'll have for dinner or lunch and if they don't want then maybe they will want an hour later but don't be a short order cook. At least try not to be. :26)

V/O: Dr. Sandeep Gupta is a Pediatric Gastroenterologist with OSF Children's Hospital of Illinois. He treats a wide range of conditions in children, including those related to nutrition.

If your child is not eating to the point of not growing, or if year after year if you look at school photos and your child is the same size or they are the smallest in the class that may be cause for concern. Or if you truly believe you have tried everything as a parent and they are just an exceedingly picky eater, your child should see their doctor. Dr. Gupta says there are conditions where children truly have a problem with eating.

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(If you see some subtle things like they will have softer foods and not harder foods, or they will have hard foods but not liquids because the liquids may be going into the airway. If they have texture preferences, that is a concern. If they chew their food a lot to the point where it becomes mush in their mouth before they swallow it. Or if they are very slow eaters – like everybody's done, the dishes are done and they're still struggling with the first serving, or if they cut their food into very small bites. Or if you notice they're using a lot of liquid after every couple of bites to try to push the food down – those are subtle behaviors you can also note as a parent. :43)

V/O: Dr. Gupta says it is tough to know as a parent where do you draw the line. But if it's an ongoing issue or your child's growth is being affected the adage "when in doubt, reach out" should be followed.

Learn more through [OSF HealthCare Children's Hospital of Illinois](#).