

From the Food Bank Kitchen

Picky Eaters

Whether they are four or fourteen, picky eaters can be difficult during mealtimes. Some parents may ask questions such as “Should I cook separate meals for my picky eater?” “Is it okay that my child refuses to eat vegetables?” “What if these habits last into adulthood?” To best address these problems, the Nutrition Department at The Food Bank has compiled some tips from [WIC](#) on how to handle a picky eater.

- 1. My child refuses to try new foods:** Offer one new food at a time and only a small amount. It often takes a few tries for a child to become familiar and comfortable with something different. Some children respond well to a rule to taste an “Adventure Bite” of any new food on their plate; if they like it, they can ask for more. You can offer two choices and let the child pick which new option they want to try (ex: Would you like carrots or broccoli with your dinner?).
- 2. My child refuses to eat what I serve and wants something else:** If you offer one food they like at one meal, along with a few new foods, they might be more likely to eat the new items. Another option is to have them help in the kitchen with age appropriate tasks like measuring ingredients or washing vegetables. When kids are involved with the cooking process, they may be more likely to eat the meal.
- 3. My child does not eat much:** Young kids understand intuitive eating, meaning they will eat when they are hungry and stop when they are full. It is suggested not to require a child to “clean their plate”. If your child refuses food because they are not hungry at the moment, they can always eat leftovers from the meal, or a snack, once they are hungry. Also, make sure that your child doesn’t fill up on juice, milk, or sweet drinks between meals.

Phrases that Help and Phrases that Hinder

(Source: [Choosemyplate.gov](#))

What you say can change your child’s eating habits. Sometimes changing how you feed your child instead of what you feed.

Instead of...

- Eat that for me.
This may encourage kids to seek attention through eating.
- Eat one more bite before you leave the table.
It’s better for kids to stop eating when they are full and eat when they are hungry. This can encourage kids to ignore fullness.
- No dessert until you eat your vegetables.
Using food as a reward can lead to unhealthy eating patterns and might cause kids to make the connection between being upset and then feeling better when eating. It also makes some foods (like desserts) seem better than others (like vegetables).

Try...

- This is a kiwi, it’s sweet like a strawberry.
This can help kids be more aware of the foods they are eating and help them to identify why or why they do not like a food. Is it too spicy? Too sweet?
- Is your stomach telling you that you’re full?
Phrases like this help prevent overeating, and help your kids be more intuitive eaters.
- We can try vegetables again another time. Next time would you like them raw or cooked?
Reward your child with attention or kind words instead of food.

Chicken Nuggets

Makes 8 servings

Adapted from *Cooking Matters for Kids*

- 2 lbs boneless chicken pieces (breasts or thighs)
- 3 cups cornflakes cereal
- 1/3 cup flour (whole wheat preferred)
- 2 large eggs
- 1/4 cup milk (1% preferable)
- Nonstick cooking spray
- Salt and pepper to taste (about 1/4 tsp)

Directions: Preheat oven to 375°F. Remove skin, if any, from chicken pieces. If working with large pieces, cut into small cubes so they cook faster. In a medium bowl or plastic bag, crush cornflakes. In a second bowl, mix flour, salt, and pepper**. In a third bowl, mix eggs and milk and whisk together with a fork. Dip each piece of chicken into the flour, then eggs, then cornflakes; make sure all pieces are fully coated with flakes. Coat baking sheet with non-stick cooking spray and evenly place pieces on baking sheet. Spray pieces lightly with cooking spray. Bake for 20-25 minutes, or until internal cooking temperature reaches 165°F.

****Optional:** Add spices like chili powder, oregano, or paprika to flour for added flavor.

Nutrition Facts: Calories 250, Fat 10 gm, Saturated Fat 3 gm, Sodium 310 mg, Carbs 15 gm, Fiber 1 gm, Protein 24 gm