



# Picky Eaters

Nearly every child is a picky eater at one time or another, especially between the ages of two and six. Sometimes emotional issues get played out at meal times, too. A child may be trying to say, "I need more independence" or "I'm not getting enough attention."

Since no one can force a child to eat, why not relax and remember the basic rules of a good feeding relationship.

**Adults are responsible for...**What is presented to eat and the manner in which it is presented.

**Children are responsible for...**How much and even whether they eat.

## Here are some suggestions for easing the tension surrounding food:

- Consider whether the child is really a picky eater or just a light eater. Don't compare amount eaten by a 3-year old with amounts eaten by a child who is only 1- 1/2 years old.
- Focus less on what a child eats at a particular meal or snack, and look at foods eaten over several days. Research shows that if a child eats less at one meal, he will balance his intake by eating more later on in the day.
- Recognize that appetite varies from meal to meal, and day to day. Prior to growth spurts, appetite increases; prior to the onset of an illness, appetite may decrease.
- Don't push a child to take "just one more bite" in order to please you. Children naturally learn to respect their own feelings of hunger, unless you confuse them.
- Remember that a young child may have strong feelings about certain textures, flavors, consistencies and even colors. This child will take longer to accept new foods.
- Children's tastes change over time, so reintroduce foods every few weeks.
- Don't use food as a reward, punishment or pacifier.
- Don't place special significance on dessert. If served, it should be part of the meal and offered to all children, without expecting them to earn it by cleaning their plates.
- Don't make a big deal about a child's picky eating. This means no begging, bribery, threats or short-order cooking. (Calmly explain that this is the meal that is being served, and the next time the child will be able to eat is at snack time.)
- Serve small portions so that the child is not overwhelmed by the quantity of food on the plate.
- Remember that when a child rejects your food, he is not rejecting you.

Making mealtime a battleground can greatly affect a child's relationship with food. Why not make peace with your picky eater? A more relaxed attitude will help shape healthy eating habits for a lifetime.