



# DAY TO DAY: PICKY EATING AND NUTRITION

## EASY WAYS TO HELP YOUR CHILD EVERYDAY

### Planning Meals

- **Make a set schedule** for when mealtimes take place.
- **Identify a list of rules** that your child is trying to follow during mealtime. Make sure these are expectations your child is capable of handling, so as to set them up for success.
- If your child is not eating dinner within a 15-30 time period, they will be less likely to eat it later. **Limit the amount of time** spent eating to this range so that your child learns to eat when food is presented.
- Try to **mix up** the foods you serve. This can help to decrease rigidity around food preference.



### Meal Prep

- When cooking and preparing meals try to **include your child** whenever possible. This may be in the actually cooking or simply letting them **choose a certain item**, or setting the table.
- Try to make the presentation of the food **simple and fun**. Cut the food into smaller bites for your child or arrange it in a funny way on the plate.
- When its time for your child to try a new food or a food they don't like, use the **Rule of 3**: Put 2 foods they do like, with 1 new or disliked food. This way there are more positive food choices seen than negative.

**Celebrate success! Any little thing that your child accomplishes during mealtime should be praised so they know to continue the behavior in the future.**

### At the Table

- Try to keep the child seated at the table throughout the meal so they can **focus on eating** instead of being distracted by other things.
- If they want to get up from the table, perhaps allow a **compromise** of bringing a book or a favorite toy to the table.
- Make sure your child has a **secure and comfortable chair** if possible. You can also put a stool or stack books for them to put their feet on so they will feel more grounded.

### Other Tips

- **Model healthy eating habits** and preferred table manners for your child so they can use your behavior as an example of their own behavior. You can also **use a favorite doll or stuffed animal** and "pretend" they are displaying the positive eating habits your child is working toward.
- If you want your child to eat a new food you can try the **process of chaining** and **systematic desensitization**. This is when you take small steps towards introducing and eating new foods. For example:

1. Encourage them to draw a picture of the new food item
2. Encourage them to smell or touch the new food item
3. Encourage them to lick or kiss the new food item
4. Encourage them to take a bite!



OR

1. Provide a new brand of chicken nugget THEN
2. Make chicken nuggets at home THEN
3. Prepare the chicken differently



**The Autism Program**  
AT BOSTON MEDICAL CENTER



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## Augmentative and Assistive Communication

### **General Techniques and Tips:**

- Use sign language to communicate with your child about when they are hungry, or different types of foods.
- Use PECS (Picture Exchange Communication System) by exchanging pictures to communicate what foods they want and what foods you expect them to eat.
- Use any camera device to keep a picture log of the foods eaten or the child eating food so as to visualize the process.

### **Apps (available for Android, Apple devices):**

**<http://www.autismspeaks.org/autism-apps>**

**The Photo Cookbook**— Shows pictures and step by step instructions on cooking.

**I Get... Cooking**— An app providing photo books for individuals that need support understanding things relative to the kitchen, including cooking and making recipes.

**MyRoutine**— Create visual stories for daily activities/meals.

**Shopping List Generator**— Plan your grocery list with picture based app. Includes text-to-speech, prices and locations.

**First & Then**— Create first-then visuals with picture from photo gallery along with activity timer built in.

**Tim(mer) Stock**— Simple timer to keep track of time.

**Nicolas' Garden**— Made by a child. Use recipes that include step by step picture guides.



## Community/Clinics

### **-Boston Children's Hospital Growth and Nutrition/Feeding Team**

For children under 6. Covered by Medicaid and other insurance plans. Initial evaluation to understand child's full health and diet.  
(617) 355-7713

**-Floating Hospital for Children at Tufts Medical Center- Nutritional Services**  
Program works with infants through young adults creating individual nutrition plans.  
(617) 636-3266

### **-Mass General Hospital Pediatric Feeding Team and Lurie Center for Autism**

The Pediatric Feeding team gives both Pediatric Feeding evaluations for more serious eating difficulties as well as Clinical Feeding evaluations for less serious problems.  
(617) 726-2763

### **-UMass Memorial Medical Center Pediatric Feeding Disorders**

A multidisciplinary approach to helping treat nutritional and feeding-related problems. They work with the family developing strategies to promote a healthier eating style.  
(774) 443-7396

## More Information

### **The Autism Consortium's Online Quick links:**

[www.autismconsortium.org/resources-and-events/quick-links/](http://www.autismconsortium.org/resources-and-events/quick-links/)

See articles linked for:

"Overcoming Feeding Problems in a Child with Autism"

"Autism: Feeding Issues and Picky Eaters"

### **Books:**

**Just Take a Bite: Easy, Effective Answers to Food Aversions and Eating Challenges!** By: Lori Ernsperger

**Can't Eat, Won't Eat: Dietary Difficulties and Autistic Spectrum Disorders** By: Brenda Legge

**For more information visit:**  
**[bmc.org/pediatrics-autism-program](http://bmc.org/pediatrics-autism-program)**



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