



Is it really *just* picky eating?

Have you ever felt frustrated during meal times? Have you spent 20 minutes attempting to convince a three-year-old master negotiator to eat a “just tiny little bite” of cauliflower? Have you drowned green beans in cheese? Have you hid miniscule shreds of butternut squash in macaroni in cheese, praying that your child won’t notice your trickery? If so, you are not alone.

From birth, babies are expected to do two things: eat and breathe. The majority of time that most parents spend with their newborns and young children revolve around food. With the time it takes to prepare food, feed kids, and clean up, it is a miracle that parents of young children have time for anything else! The CDC recommends feeding toddlers and young children at least six (YES...SIX) times per day. This means that when feeding becomes a challenge, parents can feel like they are “failing” six times per day.

While a majority of toddlers and young children experience a certain degree of ‘picky eating’ as a part of their typical development, there is a line where strict food restrictions and aversions can become dangerous and indicative of an underlying condition, such as Pediatric Feeding Disorder.

Here are **six** signs that your child’s limited diet may be more than just ‘picky eating’ and may be signs of ‘problem feeding’:

1. Sudden or significant weight loss or failure to gain or maintain weight: If your child is losing weight, or having trouble gaining the expected amount of weight for their age, it is recommended that you consult with your pediatrician to ensure that there is not a serious underlying cause.
2. Limited diet of less than 30 foods: Problem feeders present with a significantly restricted range and variety of tolerated foods, typically less than 30 foods.
3. Eating the same food over and over, then suddenly stopping eating that food: A 'food jag' is a typical developmental pattern that occurs when a child eats the same foods prepared in the same way, every day or at every meal. Eventually they are likely to get 'burned out' on these foods and they are usually lost from the child's diet permanently. Picky Eaters

will normally accept and eat that food after taking a 2 week break without eating it but Problem Feeders will rarely ever accept that food again, even after taking a break.

4. Crying, yelling, running away from the table when new/nonpreferred foods are presented: Picky eaters will typically tolerate novel or nonpreferred foods in their vicinity. On the other hand, problem feeders may cry, protest, or “fall apart” when presented with new or nonpreferred foods.
5. Refusing entire food groups or only eating foods of similar textures/shapes/colors: Picky Eaters will eat at least one food from most food texture/ nutrition groups (i.e., starch, protein/dairy, fruit/vegetable). However, Problem Feeders will refuse to eat entire categories of food textures or nutrition groups.
6. Consistent picky eating: Problem Feeders are persistently reported by a parent as a “picky eater” across multiple well-child check-ups, typically for more than two years.

**If your child presents with one or more of the aforementioned signs, your child may be a 'problem feeder'. Please consult with your pediatrician for a referral to a feeding specialist.*

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