



OT Time!

Picky Eaters



Having a child who is a picky, fussy eater can be extremely challenging, and at times, very frustrating! It doesn't have to be. Take the time to understand *why* your child has a difficult time trying or eating new foods, and you may be able to help expand his/her food repertoire!

Is It Sensory?

It is very possible that your child may have some type of Sensory Processing Disorder that makes it difficult to eat certain foods. These behaviors may include:

- **Overly Sensitive to Sensations:** These children may avoid strong flavored foods, solid food, or lumpy food in order to prevent gagging.
- **Overly Sensitive to Smells:** These children may prefer to eat bland foods.
- **Sensory Seeking:** These children may seek out crunchy, strong flavored food.
- **Sensory-Based Motor Difficulties:** These children may have difficulty coordinating appropriate movements to use utensils needed to eat certain foods.
- **Low Muscle Tone and/or Poor Oral Motor Coordination:** These children may have difficulty chewing and swallowing, making solid foods unappealing.



Once you figure out *why* your child avoids certain foods, it will become easier to explore new foods that he/she may enjoy.

What Can You Do To Create A Better Eating Experience?

- Take note of the foods your child eats and avoids. Try to determine if there is a commonality between these types of foods.
- Allow your child to play with food not at the dinner table. Exposure to new foods will encourage exploration of sights, scents, textures, and tastes of unfamiliar food, and allow him/her to become more comfortable. Cooking together is a great way to introduce new food.
- Present food in a different way. Can a certain type of food be blended into a smoothie? Can you cut something into "fun" shapes? Are there different plates you can use when presenting food?
- Write a social story. Things to include are where you are going to eat, what you are going to eat, where the food comes from, or different ways you can eat the food.
- Offer familiar foods when offering new foods. This is likely to create a less stressful situation.
- Model eating. Make sure you are eating the foods that you are encouraging your child to eat.
- Take it slow. These changes will not happen overnight. It may take several trial-and-error attempts to find what works best for your child. **It takes 15 times of exposing a new food before a child accepts it.**
- Create a calm and quiet mealtime environment. If sensory issues exist, decreasing overall sensory input during the meal may decrease anxiety around eating.
- Never force your child to touch, taste, or eat a food. This can be a frightening experience, and it is important to respect that your child may be anxious. It is important to build trust.