

Eating Tips for Children with Autism

Children with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) often have issues with eating. These problems may include:

- Eating only one texture of food
- Wanting to eat the same foods all the time or being very picky about what they eat
- Large appetite and food intake without the feeling of fullness

Here are some general guidelines to follow when trying to get your child to eat healthier

Dealing with Texture Issues

Some children only like soft or pureed foods, like pudding and applesauce. Other children prefer crunchy textures such as chips, pretzels or cookies. Try these tips to add texture to your child's diet.

- Expose your child to food by involving him in grocery shopping and food preparation. Your child may need to see, smell or touch food many times before they are ready to taste it.
- Reoffer foods even if they have been refused in the past. Sometimes you may need to offer the food up to 20 times before it is accepted.
- If your child only eats pureed foods, sprinkle a small amount of finely crushed cracker crumbs on the pureed food. If they only eat crunchy foods, dip the crunchy food into pureed texture food such as pudding.
- Find an activity or item that may motivate your child to try a new food. When your child tries a new food, reward him right away, even if they only take one bite.
- Consider meeting with an occupational therapist who can evaluate your child for any oral motor feeding/sensory problems.
- An evaluation with a feeding psychologist may also be helpful.



Improving the Variety of Foods

Not eating a variety of foods can put your child at risk for missing vitamins and minerals they Try these tips to help your child eat more foods.

- Work on one change at a time. Pick a food your child already eats, like McDonald's french fries. Introduce the same food, like frozen french fries, and stick with it until your child begins to eat the new food.
- Avoid grazing between meals. Children are more willing to try new foods when they are hungry.

- Give your child calorie-free drinks in-between meals. Water is the best choice. Juice, Capri Sun®, soda, Kool-Aid® and milk provide calories that may decrease your child's appetite.
- Praise your child when they taste or even touches a new food. Ignore poor meal time behavior.
- Structure meal time. Eat at the table without distractions.
- Stick to a meal schedule. Serve meals and snacks around the same time every day. Keep meals to a set time.
- Give your child a nonfood reward for trying new food. The reward should be something your child enjoys, like a game, sticker or favorite activity.
- Ask your dietitian about adding a multivitamin to help your child get the nutrients missing from his diet.



Helping with GI Problems

Your child may experience gas, bloating, constipation and diarrhea. Any of these may affect how your child behaves and what your child may eat. Try these tips to reduce GI problems.

- Try to find which foods are causing problems. Testing for food allergies or intolerance may also be needed.
- Increase fiber slowly. Whole grains, fruit, vegetables, and products with added fiber such as yogurt, granola bars or cereal may help relieve constipation.
- Give your child more fluids, especially water, throughout the day.
- Probiotics may be worth a try. Culturelle® for Kids or Activia® Yogurt may help add healthy bacteria to the gut.



Eating the Right Amount of Food

Some of the medicines your child takes may cause an increase in appetite. Try these tips for curbing your child's appetite and preventing too much weight gain.

- Give your child a lower calorie option for the foods they like. For example, if they like sour cream and onion potato chips, try sour cream and onion rice cake chips.
- Give your child sugar-free/calorie-free drinks. For example, try flavored or sparkling water, crystal light, Mio drops, or PowerAde zero. If your child only drinks juice, gradually dilute the juice with water.
- Offering calorie-free drinks, preferably water, before meals and snacks can take the edge off hunger.

Growing Through Knowing



- Redirect your child when he or she asks for more food. Get them involved in an activity. Encourage more vegetables and fruits. Serve meals and snacks at a dining table. Avoid distractions like electronics and TV.
- A visual schedule with daily activities including meal and snack times may be helpful.

Try to increase daily physical activity as much as possible.



Additional Comments:

Dietitian/Diet Technician: _____

Phone number: _____