

# Picky Eating



# What is picky eating?

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Picky eating is relatively common in childhood. It is most frequently observed during the toddler years, peaking at about three years old and resolving when the child turns five. Up to 50% of parents with young children are concerned about their child's feeding.

## What are some typical 'picky eating' behaviours?

- Accepting a limited amount/variety of food
- Unwillingness to try new foods
- Varying appetite from day to day
- Accepting a certain food on some days but rejecting the same food when offered again on a different day

## Why is my child picky with food?

Children learn many new skills during their toddler years. Sticking to the same foods provides them some consistency and predictability, helping them to feel safe in this time of rapid changes (e.g. new-found independence, new skills, starting school).



# What are some mealtime tips?

## Do's



- Establish mealtime routines. Your child should have three main meals and one to two snacks per day.
- Have meals together as a family.
- Minimise screen time distractions (e.g. television, tablet, phone) during mealtimes if possible. If not, delay the introduction of distractions.



- Limit the meal duration to 30 to 45 minutes. Beyond that, children are unlikely to sit still and may end up burning more calories than they are taking in. They will also not be able to consume significantly more calories.
- Maintain a pleasant and neutral atmosphere during mealtimes.
- Trust your child when your child says he/she is full. You decide the type of food served and your child decides how much he/she will eat.
- Encourage your child to self-feed parts of the meal, while you feed the rest.
- Allow some food mess on your child, the table or the floor during mealtimes. You can lay newspapers under the highchair to reduce mess on the floor.
- Role modelling is important during mealtimes. If you want your child to eat certain foods such as vegetables, it is important to show the adults eating them first before he/she will follow suit.

## Dont's



- **Force feed your child.**

*Force feeding can be a traumatic experience for both the child and parents. It can also lead to the child developing negative associations towards eating.*

- **Give your child sweet drinks or snacks within one hour of a meal.**

*Giving sweets and snacks too close to a meal could displace the child's hunger.*

- **Ask your child if he/she likes or dislikes the new food you are offering.**

*Instead, talk about the properties of the food such as the shape, colour or taste instead.*

- **Threaten your child to eat, or punish your child if he/she does not eat the food served.**

*Instead, maintain a calm and neutral attitude when your child rejects food that is served. Do not insist that he/she eats it. However, if your child misbehaves (e.g. throws food, screams), it is important that you are firm about what behaviours you consider unacceptable.*

## How do I introduce new foods to my child?

- Offer your child new foods together with preferred foods.
- Offer new foods in small amounts.
- If your child rejects the new food, offer it again after two to three days. Children may require exposure to the new food on 10 to 20 different occasions before accepting it.
- Model good eating behaviours and praise your child for good behaviours.



## How can I engage my child in food-related activities outside of mealtimes?

Engaging in food-related activities with your child outside of mealtimes allows your child to develop positive experiences with food, without any pressure to eat.

Some ideas you can adopt are:

- Bring your child grocery shopping. Both of you can talk about what you see or smell in the shops.
- Cook or bake with your child using child-friendly recipes. You can also involve your child in the food preparation process e.g. cracking/peeling an egg or whisking butter.
- Do arts and crafts with your child. Use vegetables as stamps or sauces as paint.
- Engage in sensory play. Your child can play hide-and-seek with toys hidden in a box of coloured rice or pasta.
- Stimulate your child's imagination with pretend play. You and your child can play with cooking toys or role-play in a chef's costume.
- Watch food-related videos with your child.



## When should I seek professional help?

Consult a doctor if:

- You have concerns about your child's growth.
- Mealtimes are causing you stress.
- Your child accepts fewer than 10 foods in each food group (vegetables, fruits, grains, protein and dairy).
- Your child is choking, coughing or vomiting during meals.
- Your child appears to be in pain or distress during feeding.
- Your child has difficulty progressing in food textures.

If your child is below 4 years old, you can use this quick screening tool to determine if your child's feeding difficulties require medical attention. If you have chosen two or more answers in a blue box, please make an appointment to see a paediatrician.

## Infant and Child Feeding Questionnaire Screening Tool

Does your child let you know when he/she is hungry?	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	
Do you think your child eats enough?	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	
How many minutes does it usually take to feed your child?	<b>&lt;5</b>	<b>5-30</b>	<b>&gt;30</b>
Do you have to do anything special to help your child eat?	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	
Does your child let you know when he/she is full?	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	
Do you have concerns about your child's feeding?	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	

Reference: [FeedingMatters.org](http://FeedingMatters.org)

## Useful Links

- **How to Handle Picky Eaters**  
[www.zerotothree.org](http://www.zerotothree.org)
- **SOS Approach to Feeding**  
[www.sosapproachtfeeding.com](http://www.sosapproachtfeeding.com)
- **The Infant and Child Feeding Questionnaire Screening Tool**  
[www.feedingmatters.org](http://www.feedingmatters.org)

## NUH Feeding and Nutrition Clinic

NUH Feeding and Nutrition Clinic is part of the Khoo Teck Puat - National University Children's Medical Institute at National University Hospital. The multidisciplinary team, consisting of paediatricians, dietitians, psychologists and speech therapists, provides a one-stop assessment clinic of your child's feeding skills and behaviours as well as feeding interactions with your family.

# About the Khoo Teck Puat – National University Children’s Medical Institute (KTP-NUCMI)

The KTP-NUCMI is the paediatric arm of the National University Hospital and comprises the Departments of Paediatrics, Paediatric Surgery and Neonatology. We provide comprehensive and specialised medical and surgical services for newborns, children and adolescents, and are the only public hospital in Singapore that offers paediatric kidney and liver transplant programmes. Through a generous gift from the Estate of Khoo Teck Puat, we have set up an integrated outpatient facility with medical, diagnostic and rehabilitation services.

For more information about us, visit [www.nuh.com.sg/nuhkids](http://www.nuh.com.sg/nuhkids).

## Contact Us

### 24-hour Children’s Emergency

Location: NUH Main Building, Zone F, Level 1  
General Enquiry: +65 6772 2555

### KTP-NUCMI

Location: NUH Main Building, Zone E, Level 2 (Accessible via Kent Ridge Wing, Zone C, Level 2, Lift Lobby C)  
Operating Hours: 8.30am – 5.30pm (Mon to Fri), 8.30am – 12.30pm (Sat)  
General Enquiry: +65 6772 5736 Appointment Line: +65 6772 2002  
Fax: +65 6776 2102 Email: [ktpnucmi\\_appt@nuhs.edu.sg](mailto:ktpnucmi_appt@nuhs.edu.sg)

### 9a Viva-University Children’s Cancer Centre

Location: NUH Medical Centre, Zone B, Level 9  
Operating Hours: 8.30am – 5.30pm (Mon to Fri) Appointment Line: +65 6772 5030  
Fax: +65 6872 4314 Email: [cbccappt@nuhs.edu.sg](mailto:cbccappt@nuhs.edu.sg)

### NUH Children’s Urgent Care Clinic @ Bukit Panjang

Location: Junction 10, 1 Woodlands Road, #01-22, Singapore 677899  
Operating Hours: 9am – 11pm daily (including public holidays)  
General Enquiry: +65 6219 1538 Email: [childreucc@nuhs.edu.sg](mailto:childreucc@nuhs.edu.sg)  
Website: [www.nuh.com.sg/ucc](http://www.nuh.com.sg/ucc)

### NUH Child Development Unit @ JMC

Location: Jurong Medical Centre, 60 Jurong West Central 3, Level 2, Singapore 648346  
Operating Hours: 8.30am – 5.30pm (Mon to Fri) Appointment Line: +65 6665 2530/2531  
Fax: +65 6665 0158 Email: [cdu@nuhs.edu.sg](mailto:cdu@nuhs.edu.sg)  
Website: [www.nuh.com.sg/cdu](http://www.nuh.com.sg/cdu)

### NUH Child Development Unit @ Keat Hong

Location: Keat Hong Community Club, 2 Choa Chu Kang Loop, #03-01, Singapore 689687  
Operating Hours: 8.30am – 5.30pm (Mon to Fri) Appointment Line: +65 6769 4537/4637  
Fax: +65 6665 0158 Email: [cdu@nuhs.edu.sg](mailto:cdu@nuhs.edu.sg)  
Website: [www.nuh.com.sg/cdu](http://www.nuh.com.sg/cdu)

### National University Hospital

Location: 5 Lower Kent Ridge Road, Singapore 119074  
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Website: [www.nuh.com.sg](http://www.nuh.com.sg)



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