Why Won’t My One-year-old Eat?



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Remember when feeding your baby was fun? They way he opened his mouth like a baby bird when you fed him oatmeal. They way she thumped her hands on the high chair tray waiting for another bite of mashed bananas. It was hard not to laugh as your nine-month-old slowly picked up each piece of pancake and chewed thoughtfully, or the way your eleven-month-old, covered in tomato sauce, double fisted a messy meal of cut up meatballs and elbow noodles. And then they turned one. You call your pediatrician and search the internet to ask, why won’t my one-year-old eat?

Maybe they actually did not stop eating entirely, but instead of the serene or comic meals you used to enjoy with your baby in the high chair, you now have a one-year-old who deliberately deposits each pea off of the high chair tray and

onto the floor, smooshes their potatoes all over the plate, or thrashes like a chained-up wild beast to escape their high chair. You fluster, you offer other previously enjoyed foods, you become convinced they will starve, you offer a cookie, you offer more milk, you cry.

Let us reassure you: your one-year-old most likely is acting in a normal and predictable way. In this post, we explain why many one-year-olds seem to stop eating, and how to handle your suddenly picky, food-averse one-year-old.

Recall that we pediatricians expected your newborn to gain one pound every other week. In contrast, we expect your one-year-old to gain one pound every THREE MONTHS! Your baby is now growing at a slower rate. Correspondingly, their appetites slow down.

Have you heard the saying, “Hunger is the best sauce?” The way to help your one-year-old to eat, and to avoid disordered eating, is to allow them to feel hungry. Typical toddler appetites vary from day to day. Some days they eat as much as you, and sometimes they subsist on air! Most of them thrive anyway. One reason you have pediatrician visits every 3 months with your one-year-old is to be sure they gain weight appropriately.

Here are some Do’s and Don’ts:

- DO offer the same structured meal times that you had as a child: breakfast, lunch, dinner, and one or two snacks a day. That’s plenty of opportunity to eat.
- DO make mealtime enjoyable. Gather your family together to eat as often as you can. Talk about the day, joke a bit, serve whatever you are eating as long as there are no choking hazards. To avoid frustration, include at

least one item – fruit, veggie, protein, carb, or dairy- that you are fairly sure your child will eat.

- DO serve bite sized food in small portions and allow your child to ask for more.
- DO allow your child to enjoy your company while you enjoy theirs, *even if your child eats nothing*. Respect their short attention span and allow them to go play after a few minutes of not eating anything. They can play on the floor near you while you finish your meal.
- Most importantly, DO pretend that you feel fine if they eat and fine if they don't eat. Of course you will care, but your only job is to present healthy food. It is your child's job to decide if they will eat and how much they will eat.

- Avoid letting your child graze from a bottle, breasts, or sippy cup all day. Sucking fluid is a habit. Drinking from a cup at mealtime satisfies thirst. Filling a small toddler belly with fluid all day wards off hunger and almost guarantees that your child will have no room for actual food at meal time.
- Likewise, giving food as a reward or as an activity between meals and snack times will also fill them up before it's time to actually eat.
- Avoid chasing them with food as they play or offering food while they watch a video. While this might work for a brief time, ultimately it does not improve their eating. Instead, it teaches them to eat *for you* or *for the video*, but not *for hunger*. This practice can lead to disordered eating patterns.
- Avoid feeding them or nursing them in the middle of the night. If you feed them anything substantial, you fill their bellies and they may not be hungry for breakfast in the morning. Besides, you wouldn't drink something in the middle of the night without brushing your teeth. Do the same for your child.

- Avoid too many choices. Offer the foods you have already prepared for the rest of the family, and leave the choice of “to eat or not to eat” to your toddler.

We invite you to read more about how to outwit, outplay, and outlast **picky eaters** here.

Read about many aspects of **one-year-old development**, including food refusal, here.

Julie Kardos, MD and Naline Lai, MD

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Feeding picky eaters plus some recipes



Photo credit: Lexi Logan

Back by popular demand: our picky eater post, with bonus recipes at the end.

“You just don’t appreciate a picky eater until you have one.” —Overheard at Dr. Lai’s dinner table

Picky eaters come in two major varieties.

One kind is the child who eats the same foods every day and will not vary her diet. For example, breakfast is always the same cereal with milk and a banana, lunch is always peanut butter and jelly, and dinner is some form of chicken, rice, and peas. This diet is nutritionally complete (fruit, vegetable, protein, dairy, carbohydrate) but is boring to the parent.

The other kind of picky eater is the child who leaves out entire food groups, most commonly vegetables or meat, or

leaves out meals, such as always eats breakfast but never eats dinner.

My twins, when younger, ranged from the One Who Tried Anything to the One Who Refused Everything! My oldest child lived on cheerios and peanut butter and jelly for about two years, but now he eats crab legs and bulgur wheat and sushi. My point: I feel your frustration, and I will give you advice that works as well as optimism and a new way of thinking about feeding your children.

Fortunately, from a medical point of view, toddler/children nutrition needs to be complete as you look over several days, not just one meal. For example, if every three days your child has eaten some fruit, vegetables, protein, dairy, and complex carbs, then nutritional needs are met and your child will thrive. Of course, if your child's pediatrician has determined that your child is not growing appropriately, you may need to look "beyond the picky" into medical causes and treatments of poor growth.

Ways to outwit, outplay, and outlast picky eaters

1. **Never let them know you care about what they eat.** If you struggle with your child at mealtimes, she will not eat and you will continue to feel bad about her not eating. Talk about the day, not about the food, at mealtime. You want your child to eat for the simple reason that she feels hungry, not to please you or anyone else, and not because she feels glad or mad or sad. Also, refrain from cooking a "special meal" for your toddler. Typically once a toddler catches on that you desperately want her to eat your cooking, she will refuse it.
2. **Do let them help you cook**. Even young children can wash vegetables and fruit, arrange food on platters, mix, pour, and sprinkle ingredients. Older kids can practice reading aloud from recipes and can help measure. Kids are more apt to taste what they help create.

3. **Let them dip their food** into salad dressing, apple sauce, ketchup, etc., which can make their food more appealing or interesting to eat.
4. **Hide more nutritious food in the foods they already like**. For example, carefully mix vegetables into meatballs or meatloaf or into macaroni and cheese. Bright green smoothies hiding kale and other greens are very popular. See the recipes at the end of this post for Zucchini chocolate chip muffins and Magic Soup.
5. **Remember to offer foods that YOU do NOT like**– your kids might like them! Here is an example: When my children were toddlers, we decorated Easter eggs at Dr. Lai's house with her children. My kids asked if they could eat their decorated hard boiled eggs. Understand that hard boiled eggs is one food that I do NOT like. I don't like their smell, their texture, and I really do not like the way they taste. Yet, all three of my kids, including my pickiest, loved those hard boiled eggs dipped in a little salt. Go figure. I had found an inexpensive, easy, healthy protein source to offer, even though I can't stand the way my kitchen smells when I cook them.. but hey, if my kids actually EAT them…
6. **In the same vein, offer foods that you assume they will not like.** Dr. Lai was shocked to find that her pickiest eater enjoyed hot and spicy food.
7. **Continue to offer foods even if your picky eater refuses them**. Don't force feed, just have them on the table. It could take 20 or 30 exposures before your kids might try them so do not despair. It took EIGHT YEARS of exposure to broccoli (one of my personal favorite vegetables) until two of my three kids decided they love it too. One still does not eat it. And that's ok.
8. **Hunger is the best sauce**. Refrain from offering junk food as snacks or as reward for eating "real" food. Pretzels, crackers, cookies, candy, cake, and chips have NO nutritional value yet fill up small bellies quickly.

Your insightful child will HOLD OUT for the junk and refuse good nutrition if they know they can fill up on snacks later. Along the same line, avoid bribing food for food. Chances are, if you bribe eating vegetables with cookies, the focus for the rest of the meal will be on the cookies and a tantrum will follow. You and your child will have belly aches from stress rather than full bellies. While it is tempting to let your child gaze all day, this will simply fill your child up so that she does not feel hunger at a meal or snack. Beware, even water can suppress the appetite.

9. **If the goal is to have your children eat real food, then avoid "fake food."** Pouches with pureed fruit/veggie/cereal combos, fruit bars, fruit juice, protein shakes, and Puffs all may have nutrients but often have much sugar that grazes teeth and do not teach young taste buds the texture and flavors of healthier versions of actual fruits, vegetables, cereal, and protein sources such as meat.
10. **It is okay to repeat similar meals day after day as long as they are nutritious**. We might like variety as grownups but many toddlers and young kids prefer sameness and predictability.
11. **Avoid becoming a "short order" chef**. Picky eaters quickly take advantage of their power to make parents prepare multiple meals and likely end up not eating anyway. When your child says "I don't want this! I want something else!" at breakfast, lunch, or dinner, you can answer calmly but firmly, "The meal is on the table." It's okay if they eat only one of the foods on the table. Next week she might try another. A different approach that some families use is to have one back-up meal that is the same every day for every meal and must be completely non-cook and nutritious. Examples are low sugar cereal and milk, peanut butter and jelly sandwich, yogurt with nuts or fruit mixed in, etc. that you agree to serve if your child does not want to eat

what the rest of the family is eating.

12. **You can give your child a pediatric multivitamin.** This tactic is not giving up or cheating. It can give the Parent as Provider of Nutrients peace of mind. You can give the multivitamin every day or just on the days that you are convinced that your child has eaten nothing.
13. **Read *Green Eggs and Ham,* by Dr. Seuss**, to your young picky eater. It stars a picky eater who becomes convinced to "try them." You may, however, need to learn to make green eggs!

Zucchini muffins (or just call them "green muffins")

3 cups flour, 1Tbs baking powder, 1 tsp salt, 1/2 tsp baking soda 1 1/2 tsp cinnamon, 1/2 tsp nutmeg

2 eggs, 1/2 cup low-fat milk, 1/2 cup canola or vegetable oil, 1 cup sugar, 2 cups shredded zucchini – approximately 2 medium zucchini- leave skins ON. OPTIONAL (but yummy): 1/2 cup mini chocolate chips

Preheat oven to 375F.

Stir together flour, baking powder, salt, baking soda, cinnamon, and nutmeg.

In separate bowl, beat eggs with electric mixer x 1 minute. Beat in milk, oil, and sugar. Stir in zucchini until well blended.

Add flour mixture to batter a bit at a time and stir to mix.

Mix in chocolate chips, if desired.

Spoon into greased muffin tins or place paper muffin liners, sprinkle tops of batter with a bit of sugar or "cinnamon sugar"

Bake 20 minutes, or until tops are golden brown and spring back when you touch them.

Magic Soup recipe

Take a large soup pot. Add raw chicken parts (breasts, thighs-bones add to the flavor) and cover with water.

Add onion, carrots, celery, cauliflower.

Flavor with salt, small amount of pepper, and any spice you like- I use tarragon but you can also use cilantro, parsley, curry powder, ginger.

Bring to boil, then cover and simmer for approximately 2 hours. toward the end, add some nappa (Chinese cabbage) or regular cabbage, cook until cabbage is wilted.

Serve to picky eaters: pull out the soft chicken pieces to pick up, pull out cooked vegetables – good finger food as well. Serve the broth in a cup. Most vitamins are water soluble, which means that even if your child only drinks the soup or if you pour the soup over something your child already likes such as noodles or rice, they are still getting all of the nutrition from your soup (hence, “magic soup”).

Julie Kardos, MD with Naline Lai, MD

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Cold weather is here: time to start an organic produce garden with your kids



We welcome pediatrician Dr. Marion Mass to talk about starting a garden from a piece of suburban lawn. – Drs. Kardos and Lai

A few years back, my family was getting ready for my parents to come for dinner and I was peeling the skins off the roasted beets we had grown for my mother. One of her favorites…but not mine. My five-year-old Brian had picked the beets and was eager to try them. As Brian brought a sliver of beet up to his mouth I braced myself for a " yucky face". Instead, I was shocked to see him gobble the beets up. He loved them. To this day, beets are one of his favorite veggies.

Hands down, the best activity I have ever done with my family

is planting and nurturing an organic garden for 11 years. Along the path to growing delectable vegetables, we have discovered together gardening's health, intellectual and social benefits.

Actively tied to the process of supplying their own food, gardening kids will naturally want to eat more and more produce. Kids develop a sense of pride (truly, a basketful of beans, lettuce and cucumbers is so attractive) and eventually they develop a positive association with the outdoors and vegetables. In addition to eating more quantity, what your kids eat will be healthier than store bought veggies. Produce closer to harvest contains more nutrients and you don't get closer than your own yard to table. If you garden organically, you will also avoid potentially harmful chemicals. Lastly, there is a sense of relaxation upon stepping into a garden. It is a balm for anxiety, for depression, for anger; in short, one of the best adjuvants to mental health therapy that I know.

If you want to harvest a crop next year, and you live in a cold weather area of the northern hemisphere, NOW is the best time to start. The most cumbersome task of starting a garden is to dig up the sod (existing lawn), but a few tricks in the fall can prevent this disc-slipping chore.

- Chose a spot in your yard that gets at least 6 and preferably 8 hours of sunlight a day.
- If possible, stay away from edges, tree lines and spots where large garden parasites (such as deer, rabbit and groundhogs) lurk.
- If you live next to a pesticide happy neighbor, you will want to locate your garden away from a spray zone and will want to think about runoff. A helpful site to determine runoff capabilities of specific pesticides is: http://www.pw.ucr.edu/
- Remember you may need to water your organic garden bed once in awhile, so keep it close to a water source (or

at least someplace to which you don’t mind lugging a hose).

- Start small: a 3 x 10 foot plot can grow a good bit if you plan well. Lay out a 12 layer thick plot of newspaper over the grass where you want your garden to grow and dump 4 inches of composted manure, manure and hummus mix or mushroom soil over top of the newspaper. You can purchase in bulk from a garden center (I would do 2 cubic yards for a 3 x 10 spot) or in bags (about 15 40 lb bags).

That’s it. Now go away and leave the garden alone until spring. During the fall and winter, the grass will die and the newspaper will rot. Both will become a source of composted nutrients for your garden veggies. While you hibernate this winter, start your wheels turning and think about what crops you will grow. Buy a few packs of discounted seeds now; they will still germinate next year.

When the ground is ready in the spring, rent a tiller or get a sturdy pitchfork (trust me, the tiller is SO much easier!!) and turn over the soil mixing the composted manure, rotted newspaper and dead sod into the rocky soil we have around here. The result will be a much richer garden soil that your vegetables will love.

What are you waiting for?? Get cracking now and start your produce garden. Hopefully, by next spring your kids will be eating and enjoying organic beets that they grew !!!!

Marion Mass MD, FAAP

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In practice for 17 years, Marion Mass MD, FAAP graduated from Penn State and Duke University Medical School. She completed her pediatric residency at Northwestern University's Children's Memorial Hospital in Chicago. Currently Dr. Mass works at Jellinek Pediatrics in Doylestown, PA and serves on the Wellness Council of the Central Bucks School District, PA. Produce from her kids' garden garnishes the plates of many local families as well as the plates of the restaurant Puck. All garden profits benefit Relay for Life. When she is not in her home garden, you can find her also tending to her son's middle school garden.