

TIPS FOR FOOD SELECTIVITY INFORMATION SHEET

People with autism often have difficulty with food. Some individuals may have limited foods they like, have ritualistic eating behaviors or have sensory issues. If your child has difficulty with food selectivity, here are some tips to help.

Rule out medical concerns

Gastrointestinal problems are common among children with autism. Your doctor can help you figure out if your child has any medical concerns in this area and provide ways to help your child. These can include dietary changes, exercise or medications.

Don't stress

Many children need to try food many times before they are willing to eat it without fussing. Children with autism can take longer. If your child continues to reject a certain food after 15-20 tries, it may be because they do not like it. Consider trying a new food rather than making meal-time a battle.

Take your time

Many individuals with autism are hesitant to try new things. Help your child explore the new food by looking at it, touching it, and smelling it. Sometimes introducing it with a favorite food can help. Try playing with the food as a way to decrease anxiety. Use new food to make faces on a pizza or use a cookie cutter to make a sandwich in to a fun shape. Having your child help cook or prepare the food can also help.

Offer choices

Offering a child choices is a great way to help them feel in control and may increase the chance of them trying new foods. Offer choices within the food categories would like them to eat (vegetables, fruit, protein, etc.).

Use behavioral strategies

Use simple behavioral techniques to encourage your child to try new foods and help build positive momentum for trying even more new things. Here are some ideas on how to reinforce good eating habits:

- Have the child eat at least one mouthful of a new food item at every meal. If they do, provide praise and a preferred food item as a reward.
- Guide the spoon to child's mouth and if they accept the food give the child praise. Do not continue if they resist guidance or become upset.
- If they refuse the new food, remove it from the plate but, child must finish other food on plate.

Consult specialists

If a child has extreme food selectivity that interferes with normal growth and development, consider consulting a feeding program that specializes in this area.

References: [Feeding Problems in Children with Autism](#), [Autism Speaks: Seven Ways to Help a Picky Eater with Autism](#)

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