



Is your child a resistant eater?



Natalia Stasenکو MS, RD

Is your child a resistant eater?

Picky eater vs Resistant eater

Although there is no formal definition of *picky eating*, it is generally accepted that it is a developmentally appropriate phase in a child's life which starts at around 1,5-2 years and lasts till the child is 5-7 years old.

[Division of responsibility](#) in feeding helps successfully outgrow picky eating.

Division of responsibility is the [authoritative approach](#) to feeding, when parents take the upper hand with meal structure and food choices while letting children decide what to eat.

Signs of a resistant eating:

- 1. Limited food selection. Resistant eaters often accept only 10-15 foods or fewer.*
- 2. Limited food groups. Refusing one or more food groups is fairly common among resistant eaters.*
- 3. Anxiety and/or tantrums when presented with new foods. Resistant eaters often gag or become ill when presented with new foods.*
- 4. Experiencing "food jags". Resistant eaters require one or more foods be present at every meal prepared in the same manner.*

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Factors that may contribute to resistant eating

- Inadequate oral-motor skills, when the child may not have enough jaw/tongue control to chew foods.
- Sensory processing skills, such as sensitivities to smell and taste that can influence food choices.
- Gastrointestinal factors can be a problem, when children refuse to eat the food that they associate with stomach discomfort or pain.
- Environmental controls. These may include parenting around food, such as allowing the child to graze throughout the day, so that he is not hungry for meals or tolerating inappropriate mealtime behavior.
- Medical issues such as food allergies or swollen tonsils/adenoid.

How to get professional help?

Discuss with your doctor the testing your child may need and consider a multidisciplinary team approach to cover all the factors that may be contributing to the child's eating choices.

What can be done at home?

1. Involve the child in food preparation to help learn about the food outside mealtimes.
2. Incorporate fun, play-based interactions with food to reduce the child's anxiety. Everyone learns better when they are not stressed. *Just take a bite* teaches parents how to introduce foods through the sensory stages of looking, smelling, touching, tasting and eating.

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3. Do not give up when the child continues to refuse eating the food. Research proves that it takes *12-15 exposures to the food, and sometimes 12-15 exposures on every sensory stages* such as viewing, smelling, touching and tasting the food, before the child accepts it into their diet.

4. Help your child keep a food journal. Children who cannot read yet can draw pictures of the food they are learning about.

5. Implement gradual changes to familiar foods. Vary the temperature, texture, shape or taste and involve the child in the process to help her accept a wider variety foods.

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Natalia Stasenko, Registered Dietitian and Child Nutritionist

When her first child was small, Natalia made her share of feeding mistakes and battled a case of extreme picky eating that triggered her interest in pediatric nutrition.

In order to get to the bottom of the art and science of feeding kids, she trained as a Registered Dietitian at Columbia University, Teachers College in New York.

After a few years of running a successful nutrition private practice in NYC and consulting for various companies and agencies including Head Start, Natalia launched [Feeding Bytes](#) – an online program for parents where they can get the best professional advice on feeding their children from the comfort of their home.

As a national pediatric nutrition expert, Natalia has contributed to numerous media outlets including Parents Magazine, Pregnancy and Newborn Magazine, Kiwi magazine and Huffington post. She blogs monthly on [Scoop on Food blog](#) at parents.com.

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