Handling picky eaters

If you have a picky eater at home, you’re not alone! Use these strategies to help your tween or teen become a more adventurous—and healthier—eater.

Ease into it
A plate piled high with greens may overwhelm your veggie-avoiding tween. Offer small portions of new foods to encourage her to try them with no pressure. For instance, set up a family salad bar, and encourage everyone to take small amounts of different vegetables.

Limit snacks
If cookies, chips, and candy are in the house, your teen may fill up on them before or after meals rather than eat what you cook. Consider limiting unhealthy snacks so she’ll be more open to sampling what’s served at mealtimes.

Try, try again
Your child might not like broiled fish the first time she tastes it. Or the fifth! In fact, it can take as many as 15 tries to get your tween to accept a new food. Keep exposing her to new things. Perhaps serve it in a different way—put fish into tacos and top with fruit salsa, or add it to a rice bowl.

Be a good role model
Let your tween see you enjoying the healthy foods you want her to eat. Studies show that kids are more likely to eat what their parents or caregivers have. She might have spinach or lentils if you do!

How to choose a team sport
Team sports can teach your tween the value of healthy competition and the power of working together. Share these ways to help him find one that’s right for him:

- Start with a game he enjoys—he’ll be more likely to stick with it. Baseball may be a good fit if he’s always playing catch in the backyard or watching baseball games on TV.
- Choose a sport that matches his talents. If it’s easy for him to jump high or run fast, he might consider track and field or basketball. Or if he’s like a fish in water, maybe he’ll join the swim team.

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Learn while you earn

With a food-related job, your teen could bring home more than just a paycheck. It can also be a great way to build food knowledge and even be active on the job. Have him consider these positions.

**Grocery stock clerk.** Your child will learn the names of the foods he shelves. He may stock produce like starfruit and kohlrabi or sort cheese like gruyere and gorgonzola in the dairy aisle. At home, he could look up recipes to try that include interesting or unusual foods he discovers.

**Cashier.** Encourage your teenager to pay attention to how much different foods cost, what coupons customers use, and what is on sale each week. He could help you make a grocery list based on coupons and sales—this will teach him to be a smart shopper.

**Food server.** Your teen will get lots of ideas about how food can be prepared and presented, and he may even get to sample new menu items. For instance, the cook might brush pork chops with a maple-mustard glaze or use tomato and cucumber salad as a garnish. Ask him to make a meal at home that’s inspired by one from his restaurant.

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**ACTIVITY CORNER**

**Scarf workouts**

A scarf isn’t just for keeping your neck warm in winter—your tween can use it to exercise, too! Suggest these routines for her to try.

- **Do figure eights.** With legs shoulder-width apart, squat, and move a scarf in a figure-eight pattern. Start with it in your right hand, move it between your legs and behind your left knee, and grab it with your left hand. Now pass it behind your right knee, and take it with your right hand. Repeat 5 times, then reverse directions.

- **Toss and touch.** Build coordination and speed as you race against yourself. Throw a lightweight scarf in the air, and see how many times you can clap your hands before it falls back down. Catch it, and try again. Other motions to try while the scarf falls: Spin in a circle, touch your toes, or even turn a cartwheel!

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**In the Kitchen**

**Don’t overdo it!**

I was happy when my son Mason started exercising. But when he began running and lifting weights twice a day, I worried that he was becoming obsessed with it.

Together, we looked up exercise recommendations for 13-year-old boys and found out that he needs about an hour of physical activity a day. We also read that too much exercise can cause overuse injuries like muscle tears or even stress fractures.

Mason didn’t like the idea of getting hurt and not being able to work out. Now he has eased up and is exercising once a day most of the time. He’s satisfied because he feels himself getting stronger, and I feel better, too.

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**Why stick with pepperoni and mozzarella when there are so many tasty and nutritious pizza toppings out there? Try these twists.**

**Barbecue chicken**

Preheat oven to 375°F. Place 4 sandwich thins on a baking sheet, and brush each with ½ tbsp. low-sodium barbecue sauce. Top with 2 tbsp. shredded pepper-jack cheese, ¼ cup cooked shredded chicken, and 1 tsp. chopped red onion. Bake 10 minutes.

**Bell pepper and cheese**

Preheat oven to 450°F. Press whole-grain store-bought pizza dough into a round nonstick baking sheet. Drizzle with 1 tbsp. olive oil. Sprinkle with ⅛ tsp. garlic powder, and add 1 sliced green bell pepper, ½ cup shredded cheddar cheese, and ½ tsp. black pepper. Bake 12–15 minutes.

**Mediterranean pita**

Preheat oven to 450°F. Split apart 2 whole-grain pitas. Top each half with 1 tbsp. pizza sauce, 2 tbsp. crumbled feta cheese, and 1 tbsp. halved black olives. Bake 12–15 minutes.