

# INDEPENDENCE TOGETHER

*Resources for Parents of Children with Autism*



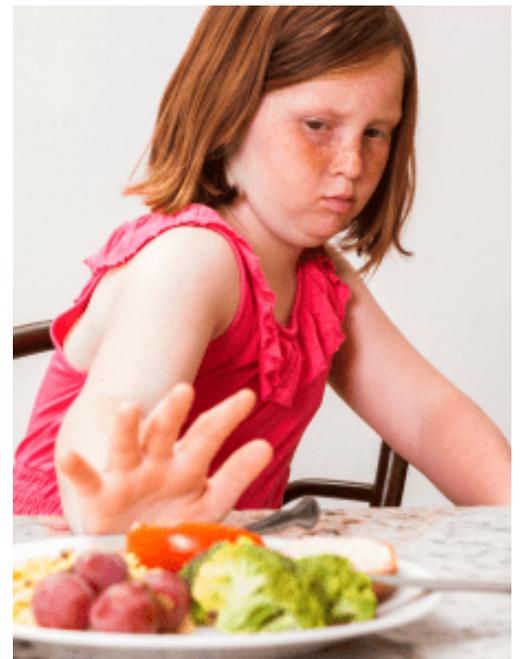
**The Autism Therapy Group**



## 10 Ways to Help Your Picky Eating Child with Autism Eat

While it's common for picky eating to be an issue with most young children, if you have a child with autism, then it's likely you do. One 2019 study revealed 70% of children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) had food aversions.

Perhaps your child is reluctant to try new foods, refuses brightly-colored foods, or steers clear of certain textures. Many times, children with autism only stick to “beige” foods like plain pasta, bread, and chicken nuggets. Obviously, this leads to concern over their nutritional needs and often generates stress and conflicts around mealtimes.





## How to Get a Child With Autism to Eat More Nutritionally

First things first: helping your child explore more food choices early is always a good idea. Yes, it can be a struggle, but early intervention is vital. The sooner you start helping your child with autism work through their food aversions, the more apt they are to be more open to new, nutritious foods going forward.

Here are ten tips for you to work into your daily routine to try to get your child with autism to eat better:

**1. Rule Out Medical Issues:** Children with autism are more likely to suffer from stomach issues than neurotypical children. If your child avoids certain foods, one reason may be because it bothers them physically. But some children with autism have difficulty communicating this. Be aware of any:

- Diarrhea
- Stomach pain
- Constipation
- Difficulty swallowing
- Acid reflux

Your child's doctor may be able to help pinpoint foods causing gastrointestinal pain.

- **2. Wind Down Before Dinner:** Many times, dinner time is one of the most stressful feeding times because it usually involves the whole family sitting down together to eat a nutritious meal. Before dinner, or whatever mealtime is most stressful, work in relaxation time into your child's routine. This could include reading a book, playing on a tablet, watching a favorite show, or playing with a particular toy. If your child is more relaxed going into mealtime, they could be more receptive to sitting down and trying new food.
- **3. Offer Options:** Overcoming picky eating takes time. You can't expect your child with autism to sit down and eat a heaping serving of broccoli right away. Instead, offer small amounts of new, nutritious foods along with foods you know they already like.

For example, give your child a tiny piece of broccoli or one pea along with their chicken nuggets. Even if they don't eat it the first time or two, they will get used to the idea of it being there and are more likely to try it eventually.

You could even take this step a little slower by putting the small portion of new food on their plate for seconds at a time until they work up to having it on their plate throughout mealtime.

**4. Take Baby Steps:** When working on how to get a child with autism to eat better, it's crucial to be patient and take baby steps. Perhaps start by having your child touch the food. Maybe they can sniff it next, then touch it to their lips and tongue. It may take a while, but taking baby steps can help your child with autism work up to trying new foods.

**5. Keep Trying:** Don't give up after one unsuccessful attempt to introduce a new food to your child with autism. When you work up to your son or daughter tasting new food, even if they don't like it, keep offering it every day, with a small taste, for at least two weeks. Don't forget, children with autism enjoy repetition!



**6. Don't Push:** Dinner-time power struggles are absolutely no fun. Dinner with the family is much better without the arguing. Try to avoid the power struggle between you and your child with autism. Do your best to stay calm and be patient, working on those baby steps. It may take your child months to work up to actually tasting a new food you've put on their plate. And that's okay.

Don't push your child so hard that it results in the dinner table becoming a battleground.

**7. Add Some Fun:** Yes, we understand playing with food is often frowned upon. But if you let your child play with new foods, they may be more open to tasting them.

Paint plates with tomato sauce or make artistic animals out of vegetables. This could help your child become more familiar with non-beige foods, leading to a more comfortable food relationship.

**8. Take a Look at Textures:** Picky eating in children with autism is often due to their hypersensitivity to textures. Even if you know a food is delicious and feel like your child may actually like its taste, their picky eating could be because of how it feels in their mouth. For example, if your child with autism avoids squishy foods, you could try changing their texture by blending or mashing them.

**9. Limit Snack Times:** As an adult, you understand how "grazing" on foods throughout the day leads to you either not being hungry at mealtimes or overdoing it. Well, the same thing goes for a child with autism. Try to stick to a repetitious eating schedule and only give snacks at designated times. Again, children with autism typically enjoy repetition and schedules.

**10. Avoid Depending on Brand Names:** Sometimes, picky eating in children with autism extends to their dependence on certain brands. Your child may feel "safer" in their eating choices when they only eat one brand of white bread, for example.

To overcome this picky eating issue, start introducing new brands of white bread, even if you have to do it in baby steps. Perhaps begin by purchasing two brands and having them both on the counter – one they are used to and a new brand. Over time, you can introduce the new brand and then try others.

## Get ABA Therapy Support to Help Your Child With Autism Eat Better

You know your child better than anyone, and you can help them overcome their food aversions best. But when you enroll your child in a high-quality Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA) program is a great way to get the professional support and tools your child needs.

As the most studied and proven form of autism therapy, ABA is proven to help children with autism, just like yours, work through everyday struggles. Here at the Autism Therapy Group, we can help your child overcome picky eating and other concerns that come along with an autism diagnosis.

**Get Started at  
ATG Today**

**Email: [info@atgtogether.com](mailto:info@atgtogether.com)**

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