

# The Food Jag Dilemma

## What is a food jag?

A food jag is when a child **will only eat one food, or a very small group of foods**, meal after meal. Some recurrent feeding issues involve a fear of trying new foods and refusal for what is being served. Although this type of restrictive feeding is common in children with autism, on ADHD medications, or with other feeding disorders, **any child can be affected.**

## My child is just a picky eater.

“Picky eating” is an **incredibly common** phase around the toddler and preschool years, and it can take many forms. Maybe they don’t like their food to touch, or certain foods are “yucky”. **For toddlers, eating is a way to express their independence**, which is just part of their normal development.

**What makes a food jag different** is the extremely limited food selection for the child and the length of time this occurs, and generally lasts longer than a week.



## Should I be concerned?

**Generally, no!** We become concerned when the food jag goes on for longer than one to two weeks with limited foods that aren’t providing enough nutrition. Don’t panic if they aren’t big eaters! **As long as your pediatrician is tracking increases in weight and height on the growth chart, there is no need to worry.**



# Daily Nutrition for Children 2-8 Years Old



## **Veggies:** 1- 1 ½ cups per day

**Focus on:** dark leafy greens for iron and folate, bell peppers are very high in vitamin C, and carrots and butternut squash are high in vitamin A  
Beans are a great source of protein and fiber

## **Fruits:** 1- 1 ½ cups per day

**Focus on:** removing or watering down fruit juices, offer whole fruits for fiber, orange or apple slices with lunch/snacks, banana or applesauce with breakfast



## **Fats and Oils:** 3-4 teaspoons oil per day

**Focus on:** fats are essential for growing brains, offer healthy fats with avocado, olive and canola oil, nuts, and fatty fish

## **Dairy:** 2-2 ½ cups per day

**Focus on:** calcium and vitamin D provided in cheese, milk, yogurt, are necessary for building healthy bones

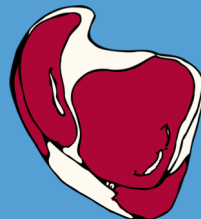


## **Grains:** 3-5 ounces per day

**Focus on:** iron and zinc fortified cereals and oatmeal  
**1 ounce** 1 slice bread, 5 whole wheat crackers, ½ English muffin, ½ cup cooked oatmeal, rice, pasta, or 1 cup cereal

## **Protein:** 2-4 ounces per day

**Focus on:** red meats are rich in iron and zinc, canned tuna and fatty fish are good sources of vitamin D and omega-3 fats  
1 small chicken breast is about 3 ounces, and ¼ cup bean protein = 1 ounce



## I've tried everything!

It is natural to be concerned and argue or bargain with your child to eat. It is important to resist the urge **and let your little one express freedom of choice.** These tips will help you and your toddler navigate through this tough time:

- **Stick to a schedule** of eating every 2-3 hours.
- Create a **positive eating environment** - Turn off the TV, put the toys away, and offer meals in a quiet environment in a chair or high chair.
- Choose nutritious foods and **let your toddler explore their appetite** - offer all the food groups throughout the day and **rotate for variety** - Grapes one day, cut strawberries the next.
- Small tummies need small portions - offer variety but keep the portions small and **limit fluids during meal time**, add fluids between meals and with snacks.
- **Praise and pressure can both backfire - remain neutral.**
- If your child doesn't eat for 24 hours, **trust that they WILL eat when the hunger arises.** If this goes on for more than a day or two, it may be time to visit the pediatrician.
- Remember that **your job is to decide what you offer and when you offer it**, and it is **their job to decide how much they eat or if they want to eat at all** – Ellyn Satter's Division of Feeding Responsibility – **it's all about balance.**

