



HASSENFELD
**CHILDREN'S
HOSPITAL**
AT NYU LANGONE

When to Wonder: Picky Eating Resources

**Brought to you by
The WonderLab in the Department of Child and
Adolescent Psychiatry at NYU Langone Health**

When to Wonder: Picky Eating Resources

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WHAT IS PICKY EATING?

About 20 of 100 (20%) young kids are moderate or severe picky eaters.

- 17 out of 100 (17%) have a restricted diet (moderate)
- 3 out of 100 (3%) have a restricted diet that limits their ability to eat with others (severe).

Picky eating is

- Sometimes a normal part of development, a “phase.” Between 2 and 3 years old, kids may decrease the variety of food they will eat. They may resist trying new foods. Openness to food variety may increase as the child grows up.
- Sometimes an enduring pattern of eating and feeding behaviors that children do not “grow out of.”
- Eating a very limited range of foods, having strong food preferences, being unwilling to try new food, lack of interest in food, having strong reactions to the smell, taste, texture, or look of food.
- Not just about the child’s eating behaviors.
- About how the child feels and experiences the world, especially food and eating.
- About emotions, like fear and worry and disgust.
- About how a child experiences the taste, texture, smell, and look of food.
- Sometimes called “selective eating.”

Children with moderate or severe picky eating

- Are often extra-sensitive to taste, smell, food texture, and how food looks, which [Dr. Zucker](#) calls “sensory superpowers.”
- Are often extra-sensitive to loud noises, lights, and motion.
- May have experienced choking, gagging, or swallowing difficulties.
- May have witnessed another person choking or gagging.
- May be afraid of vomiting, choking, or gagging.
- May have tummy aches.
- Can be skinny, regular weight, or overweight.
- May have their nutrition and growth impacted, but often don’t.
- Often feel weird, embarrassed, a “bad” person, or disappointing.
- May have social anxiety, general anxiety, separation anxiety, and depression.
- May have autism spectrum disorder or other developmental challenges.
- Can have many conflicts with parents and family members, especially at mealtimes.
- Can find it hard to go to playdates, birthday parties, family gatherings, or eat out because they are worried or upset about what they can eat.

Parents of picky eaters

- Often feel frustrated, worried, sad, powerless, mad, or overwhelmed.
- Often feel their child is rejecting them.
- Often feel criticized and judged by family members, friends, busy bodies.
- Get lots of advice that simply doesn’t help.
- May have their own childhood experiences with picky eating or food issues.
- May be picky eaters still.

- May be struggling with anxiety, depression, or an eating disorder.
- May feel alone.

Bottom Line: You are not alone. It is hard to be a picky eater! And it is hard to be the parent of a child you love who is a picky eater! There is help and hope.

WHAT IS ARFID?

ARFID (Avoidant Restrictive Food Intake Disorder) is an eating/feeding disorder

Here are the symptoms of [ARFID](#):

- Eating or feeding disturbance (lack of interest in food, sensory aversion to food, or concerns about choking, gagging or vomiting from eating).
- Weight loss or failure to gain weight or grow, significant nutritional deficiency, dependence on tube feeding or oral nutritional sustenance, or severe interference with child's functioning.
- Child doesn't have anorexia, bulimia, or a medical condition, and has food available.

ARFID is a new diagnosis, so we still have a lot to learn. A [2017 study](#) found that 3/1000 children had ARFID. Children with ARFID were more likely to have a co-occurring medical condition, have gastrointestinal distress, and have an anxiety disorder.

If you are concerned that your child might have ARFID, please talk with your child's doctor.

Here are a few links about treatment:

[Helpline](#)

National Eating Disorders Association

[Dr. Zucker](#)

Duke Center for Eating Disorders

You can help researchers at the Duke Center for Eating Disorders learn more about childhood ARFID:

Join [Duke Database for Parents of Kids with ARFID](#)

SUPPORT FOR PICKY EATING

Talk with your child's doctor if you are worried about your child's picky eating. Here are some tips for you to try at home.

[Dr. Nancy Zucker on Picky Eating](#)
Food Sleuth Radio

[Tips for Parents of Picky Eaters](#)

[The Picky Eater Project](#)
American Academy of Pediatrics

[Tips for Parents of Young Picky Eaters](#)
Zero to Three

[Tips for Picky Eaters](#)
Mayo Clinic

[Tips for Picky Preschoolers](#)
US Department of Agriculture

[Picky Eating Strategies](#)
Department of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, NYU Langone Health

NUTRITION

Here is some information about nutrition and young kids.

[Nutrition and Your 1-year-old \(English\)](#)

[Nutrition and Your 1-year-old \(Spanish\)](#)

[Nutrition and Your 2-year-old \(English\)](#)

[Nutrition and Your 2-year-old \(Spanish\)](#)

[Nutrition and Your 3-year-old \(English\)](#)

[Nutrition and Your 3-year-old \(Spanish\)](#)

[Nutrition and Your 4 or 5-year-old \(English\)](#)

[Nutrition and Your 4 or 5-year-old \(Spanish\)](#)

[Nutrition and Your Grade school Child](#)

American Academy of Pediatrics

[Young Child Health](#)

Zero to Three

[Nutrition: Kids](#)

[Nutrition: Infants and Toddlers](#)

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

[Eating Well](#)

Sesame Street in Communities

[Early Roots of Lifelong Health](#)

Center on the Developing Child

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Adolescent Psychiatry at NYU Langone Health

DEVELOPMENT & MENTAL HEALTH

Understanding young children’s healthy development—physical, social, emotional, and cognitive—will help you understand your child’s strengths and challenges. Early childhood mental health is critical for healthy development. Knowing the warning signs of mental health challenges will help you support your child’s healthy development.

DEVELOPMENT

[Milestones from 0-3](#)

[Social / Emotional Development](#)
Zero to Three

[Toddler Development](#)

[Preschool Development](#)

[Grade school Development](#)
American Academy of Pediatrics

EARLY CHILDHOOD MENTAL HEALTH

[Early Childhood Mental Health](#)
Zero to Three

[Toxic Stress and Early Childhood Mental Health](#)
Center on the Developing Child

CHILD AND ADOLESCENT MENTAL HEALTH

[Child Mental Health](#)
Centers for Disease Control

[Child Mental Health](#)
SAMHSA

Child Psychiatry

American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry

AUTISM

Picky eating is more common in children with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD). Sensory sensitivities and insistence on sameness may contribute to food refusal and a limited range of foods eaten. Medical issues like delayed oral-motor skills or gastrointestinal issues like constipation, heartburn, or abdominal pain may contribute to picky eating in kids with ASD.

[When to Worry](#)

[Tips for Eating Out](#)

Marcus Autism Center

[Q & A with an MD](#)

Seattle Children's

[Sensory Food Sensitivities](#)

Organization for Autism Research

[Tips for Picky Eaters](#)

Autism Speaks

[ASD Resources](#)

Duke Center for Autism and Brain Development

TEMPER TANTRUMS

Children who are picky eaters may have tantrums, especially about eating. Young children are learning to manage their emotions and behaviors. This is hard! Tantrums are emotional and behavioral storms that can mean different things. Try to figure out what triggered the tantrum. Preschoolers who have tantrums nearly every day and hit, bite, kick, or break objects during tantrums are at increased risk for anxiety, depression, and other mental health conditions. Consider talking with your child's doctor.

[Preschool Tantrums: When to Worry](#)

NYU Langone Department of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry

[Tantrum Tips](#)

American Academy of Pediatrics

[Tantrum Advice](#)

Mayo Clinic

[Tantrums 101](#)

[Managing Tantrums](#)

[Challenging Behaviors](#)

Zero to Three

[Tantrums](#)

[Emotions](#)

Sesame Street in Communities

ANXIETY

Anxiety is a normal part of growing up, but it can sometimes get out of hand. Children who are picky eaters have higher rates of anxiety. We worry when young kids have anxiety, fears, and worries most of the time. We worry when the anxiety causes a lot of conflict or impacts the child's activities and development. Anxiety and depression can start in the preschool years. Consider talking with your child's doctor if you are concerned about your child's anxiety.

[Early Childhood Anxiety and Depression](#)

[Recognizing Early Anxiety](#)

Encyclopedia on Early Childhood Development

[Anxiety Disorders Resource Center](#)

American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry

[Childhood Anxiety Website](#)

[Separation Anxiety](#)

[Generalized Anxiety](#)

WorryWiseKids.org

[Childhood Anxiety Disorders](#)

[Getting Help](#)

Anxiety and Depression Association of America (ADAA)

[Separation Anxiety](#)

HelpGuide.org

[Wemberly Worried](#)

Children's Book

SENSORY SENSITIVITY

[Dr. Zucker, Director of the Duke Center for Eating Disorders](#), describes children who are picky eaters as having “sensory superpowers” with more intense experiences of and reactions to the taste, texture, smell, and visual cues of food. Sensory food sensitivities are often a big part of picky eating. A child who is a picky eater may have strong emotional reactions, especially disgust or fear, to how food tastes, feels, smells, or looks. A child who is picky eater may be highly sensitive and experience food differently than you do!

[Sensory Hypersensitivity](#)

House with No Steps

[Sensory Food Aversions](#)

Dr. Chatoor

[Learning Through the Senses](#)

Sesame in the Community

[Teaching and Learning Activities About Sensory Evaluation for Older Kids](#)

Food a Fact of Life

SCREEN TIME

When to Wonder uses smartphones to understand your child and to learn about all children.

We use the phone to get direct information from kids, not just from parents. Child and parent information are both important for us to really understand young children's behaviors, emotions, and needs. We made our digital kid activities simple and short for a reason. Our kid activities are designed to minimize screen time for kids. When to Wonder wants to inspire play and fun for you and child away from your smartphone. After you and your child complete the activities on the phone, we give you strategies to support your child's development and mental health. These strategies are made for you and your child to explore together in the non-digital world, the "real" world. We use the phone to learn so you and your child can thrive in the world.

Here are some resources about screen time and young children:

[Babies & Toddlers](#)

Zero to Three

[Media Policy](#)

American Academy of Pediatrics

[Screentime Tips](#)

American Academy of Pediatrics

HOW TO GET HELP FOR YOUR CHILD

FOR EATING OR FEEDING DISORDERS

Look for an eating and/or feeding program that has experience treating selective eating. Look for multi-disciplinary programs where pediatricians, mental health professionals, physical and occupational therapists work together.

Helpline

National Eating Disorders Association

[Child Study Center Eating Disorders Service](#)

[Child Study Center Early Childhood Mental Health Service](#)

[Pediatric Interdisciplinary Nutrition & Feeding Program](#)

Hassenfeld Children's Hospital at NYU Langone

[Pediatric Feeding and Swallowing Program](#)

NYU Winthrop Hospital Children's Medical Center

[Duke Center for Eating Disorders](#)

Duke Center for Eating Disorders

[Intensive Day Hospital Feeding Program](#)

Children's Hospital of Philadelphia

[Pediatric Feeding Program](#)

Nationwide Children's

[Center for Pediatric Feeding Disorders](#)

St. Mary's Kids

FOR MENTAL HEALTH OR DEVELOPMENT

[Local Early Intervention Agencies](#)

US Center for Disease Control (CDC)

[Find a Pediatrician](#)

The American Academy of Pediatrics

[Find a Child Psychiatrist](#)

The American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry

[Find a Child Psychologist](#)

Psychology Today

[Find a Child Psychologist](#)

American Psychological Association

[When to Seek Mental Health Care for Your Child](#)

The Child Study Center at NYU Langone Health

[Facts for Families about Child Mental Health](#)

American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry

PARENTING

FOR PARENTS OF A PICKY EATER

[Off the C.U.F.F. by Dr. Zucker: Parent Skills Manual to Help your Child with an Eating Disorder](#)

Duke Center for Eating Disorders

[Parenting Picky Eaters](#)

PsychCentral

FOR PARENTS OF ALL TYPES OF KIDS

[Parent Resources](#)

[Positive Parenting](#)

[Parent Favorites](#)

Zero to Three

HELPING YOURSELF

Being a parent brings great joy and challenges. All parents have times when they feel overwhelmed. You need to get help if you are having a hard time. Family, friends, community members, and colleagues can give support. Sometimes you need more help including help from mental health professionals. Just like in an airplane emergency—put your own oxygen mask on first then put it on your child. Taking care of yourself is a critical part of being able to care for your child.

PARENT SUPPORT

[Find Support](#)

National Parent Helpline

[Taking Care of Yourself](#)

Program for Early Parent Support

[Postpartum Support for Moms and Dads](#)

Postpartum Support International

MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

[Talk About Mental Health](#)

MentalHealth.gov

WELLNESS

[Learn about how Positive Psychology can help](#)

[Gratitude Practice](#)

[Kindness Practice](#)

[Active Listening](#)

[Communication](#)

Positive Psychology Program

[Schedule Worry Time](#)
Healthy Psych

ADULT PICKY EATING

[Adult Picky Eating](#)
New York Times

[Adult Picky Eating](#)
Wall Street Journal

You can help researchers at the Duke Center for Eating Disorders learn more about adult ARFID:

Join [Duke Database for Adult Selective Eaters](#)
Duke Center for Eating Disorders

[Find Help](#)
National Eating Disorders Association

HASSENFELD CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL AT NYU LANGONE

[Hassenfeld Children's Hospital at NYU Langone](#)

[Child Study Center](#)

[Feeding and Eating Disorders Service](#)

[Pediatric Interdisciplinary Nutrition and Feeding Program](#)

[Educational Webinars](#)

[NYU Langone Health](#)

[Child Study Center](#)

[Facebook](#)

[About Our Kids](#)

[Doctor Radio](#)