Oaklin Lane

FAMILY GUIDE

Picky eater holiday plan

A simple plan from our feeding therapists for Thanksgiving and other big family meals: the week before, the day of, what to say to relatives, and when to ask for help.



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The plan in one minute

Picky eating is common in toddlers and preschoolers, and it often fades by about age 5. Holiday meals are extra hard: new foods, strong smells, a different schedule, lots of people and a long sit.

You decide, your child decides. You choose what's offered, when and where. Your child chooses whether to eat and how much. No "one more bite," no bribes, no clean-plate rule.

The week before

- **Preview the menu.** Talk about the foods so nothing is a surprise.
- **Practice one holiday food** at home, next to foods your child likes. Build a bridge: pumpkin bread, then a little pumpkin pie filling.
- **Cook together.** Washing, stirring, snapping green beans and pouring all count. Kids who help cook tend to eat more.
- **Plan the schedule.** A normal breakfast, a small snack, then only water for about 2 hours before the meal.
- **Pack a safe food** if you're eating somewhere else.

On the big day

1. **Build a safe plate:** one food your child already eats, plus a tiny taste of one or two holiday foods.
2. **Let them serve themselves** when you can.
3. **Count every step:** looking, touching and smelling are practice. Tasting comes last.
4. **Try a learning plate:** a napkin or small plate for new foods that never has to be eaten.
5. **Give them a job:** passing napkins or asking "What are you thankful for?"
6. **Keep table time short:** about 15 to 20 minutes for most toddlers.

7. **Plan a quiet break spot** for when it gets loud.
8. **Keep foods safe:** no whole nuts, whole grapes, popcorn or hard candy for kids under 4. Cut turkey small and thin.

What to say to relatives

- “We’re letting him look at it today. That’s a big step for him.”
- “She’s still getting to know sweet potatoes. Maybe next time!”
- “We have a no-pressure rule at meals. It’s really helping.”
- “He helped make the cranberry sauce. Tell Grandma what you did!”

Then change the subject. A smile and “We’ve got a plan” is enough.

Talk to a professional if your child

- Eats fewer than about 20 foods, or the list keeps getting shorter
- Often gags, coughs or vomits at meals
- Panics or melts down when a new food is near
- Isn’t gaining weight or growing as expected
- Still eats mostly purees or soft foods past about 12 to 18 months
- Makes every meal a battle

These can be signs of a pediatric feeding disorder, and feeding therapy helps.

Questions families ask

My child only ate rolls at Thanksgiving. Is that okay?

Yes. One meal doesn’t decide your child’s nutrition. What matters is the pattern over a week or a month.

How many times should I offer a new food?

Keep offering small amounts without pressure. The CDC says it can take 8 to 10 tries, and the AAP says 10 or more.

We’re here when you’re ready.

Questions about your child? Our therapists will give you a straight answer, no pressure.

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Start online at **oaklinlane.com/get-started** · Free tools at **oaklinlane.com/resources**



Based on the American Academy of Pediatrics (10 Tips for Parents of Picky Eaters; Choking Prevention), the CDC (Picky Eaters and What to Do), the Ellyn Satter Institute’s Division of Responsibility in Feeding, ASHA, and research in the journal Appetite (2006, 2014). This guide is for education, not a diagnosis. © 2026 Oaklin Lane Pediatric Therapy.