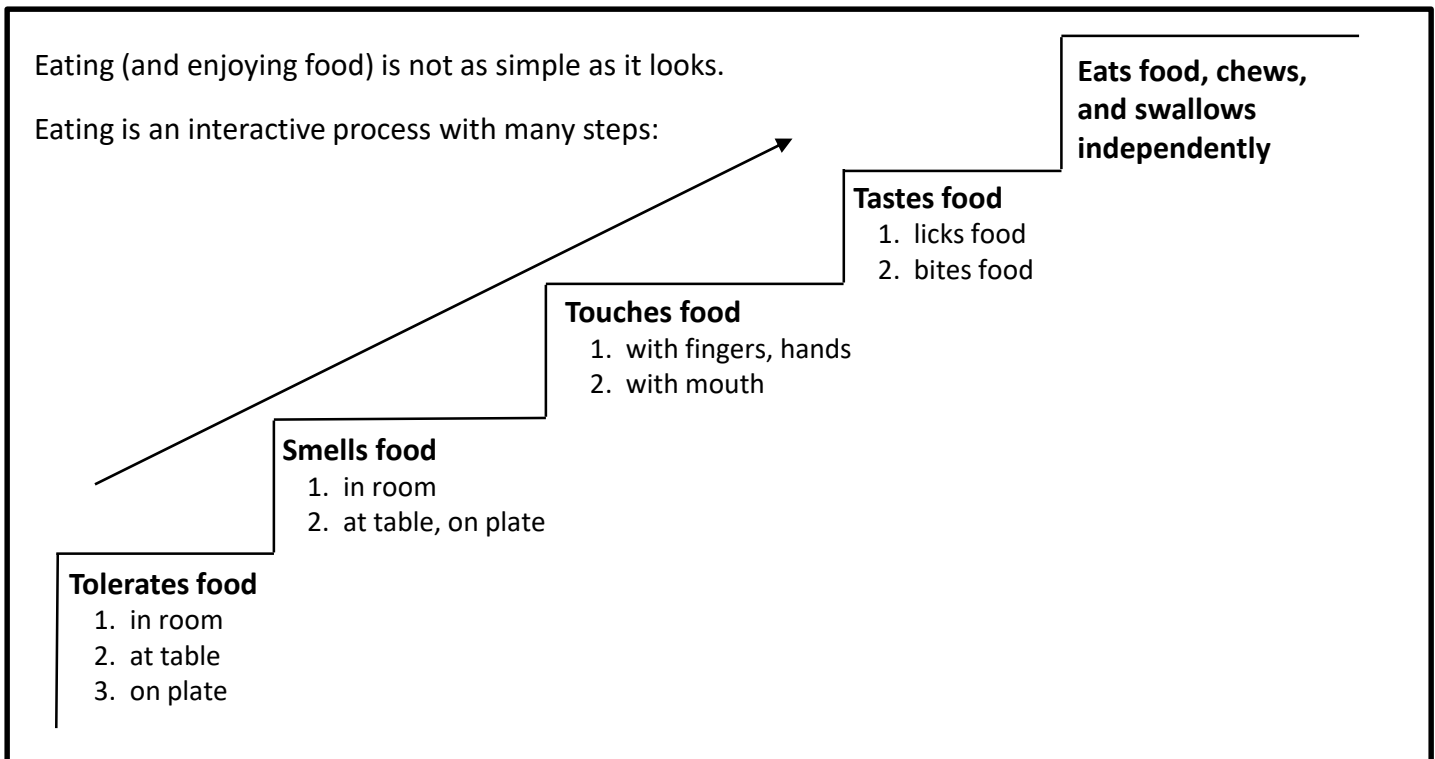


Autism, Nutrition, and Picky Eating...

- Some common behaviors in children with autism can cause problems around food and eating. (Your child may or may not have these behaviors.)

Behavior	How it might relate to children's eating
Hypersensitivity to texture, smell, taste	Refuses to eat foods with specific textures, smells, tastes
Need for routine	Refuses to eat food that looks "different"... or is in a new bowl... or is at a different place at the table
Overstimulated or overwhelmed by the environment	Distracted from meal and does not eat

- Typically developing children may need 10 or more exposures to a new food before they will eat it.
 ...children with autism who are especially sensitive to tastes, textures, smells, or new things may need even more exposures!



Adapted from "Steps to Eating" by Kay Toomey, Ph.D., Denver, CO

- It is natural for children to refuse to eat some foods at some times. This is one way to show independence and to make decisions.
- Picky eating can be a nutrition risk when:
 - one or more food groups is excluded from a child's food pattern
 - "not enough" food leads to weight loss or lack of weight gain
 - fights over eating (or not eating) put a strain on parent-child relationships

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Supplement to Lucas B, Pechstein S and Ogata B. Nutrition concerns of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders. Nutrition Focus Newsletter 17(1)1-10. January/February, 2002. Center on Human Development and Disability, University of Washington, Seattle, WA.

What may work

...but not in the long run

“Bribing” your child to eat a food.
 (“If you eat your vegetables, you can have some candy.”)

Forcing your child to “take a bite” or “have at least one taste.”

Why this is not ideal

Teaches your child that he/she shouldn’t like vegetables as much as candy, because vegetables are less desirable

Creates negative associations with food and eating. Takes control away from your child.

Suggestions to help your child enjoy new foods

Avoid overwhelming your child with too many changes:

1. Keep mealtimes constant. Use the same plates and utensils. Eat at the same place and the same time.
2. Offer small servings of a few (2-3) foods at one time...avoid offering TOO MUCH FOOD and TOO MANY CHOICES.
3. Offer new foods along with foods your child already likes to eat.

Introduce foods in forms that are similar to foods your child already eats and make changes gradually.

For example, if your child eats crackers, but not sandwiches:

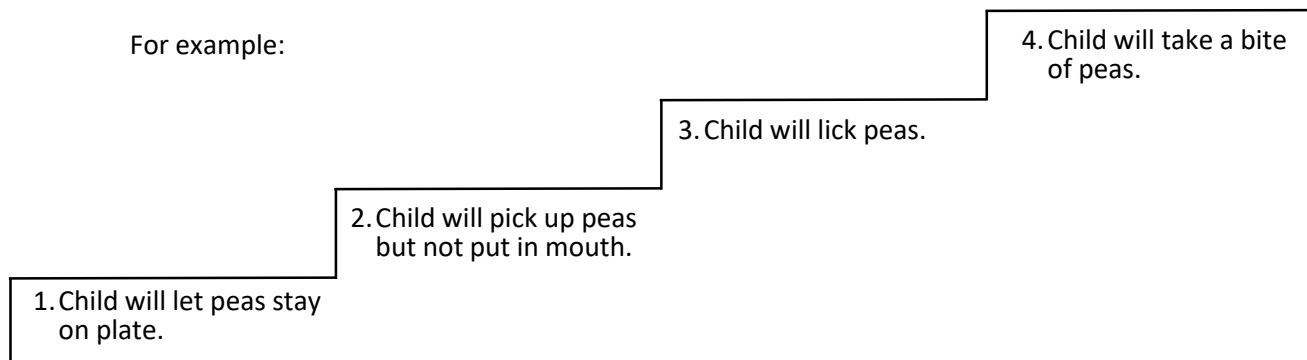
First offer sandwiches made with crackers

Then, offer sandwiches made on toast

Finally, offer sandwiches made on bread

Expect slow changes. Follow your child through the steps of the process... Set realistic goals.

For example:



Ask your child’s teacher for help.

1. Pick one “goal food” to offer at snack time and/or lunch. Offer this same food at home.
2. Use non-food reinforcers. Using food as a reinforcer teaches your child to value this food – and can teach your child not to value other foods.
3. Incorporate eating behaviors into your child’s token reward system – a token for a “goal behavior,” such as leaving peas on plate. Remember NOT to use food as the end reward!



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