Tackling Picky Eating

UF-Gainesville Center for Autism and Related Disabilities
Prereq. skills, cont.

- Oral motor behaviors
- Fine motor behaviors
- Self-feeding behaviors
- Clear expectations

- Reinforcer assessment
- Sitting at the table
- Concept of “finished”
- Communication skills
Food selectivity assessment

- Current foods
- Past attempts to address problem
- Family’s top priorities for new foods
- Favorite foods and drinks
- Eating environment
- Eating expectations
- Medical and dietary restrictions
Getting started

- Target sitting at the table if necessary (modify portion)
- Meal and snack schedule
- Consider monitoring fluid intake
- Limit (eliminate) grazing
- Location for meals versus snacks
- Mealtime visual clutter and distractions
**First/then: sitting at table**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FIRST</th>
<th>THEN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sit at table</td>
<td>Get cotton candy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Treatment tips

- Target only one new food at a time

- Select a food that is similar in texture/consistency/taste to a preferred food

- Keep expected portion very small (reward clean plate)
First/then: clean plate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FIRST</th>
<th>THEN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eat dinner</td>
<td>Get cake</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Countdown, example
Another countdown example
Desensitization

- Separate plate
- Same plate
- Smell
- Touch
- Taste eat

Keep the bites small
Use the same food each time
Condiments

- Allow child to choose a preferred condiment
- Cover the new food with the condiment, but make sure your child can still SEE the food item
- Over time, decrease the amount of condiment
Preferred food vessel

- Choose a preferred food to act as a “carrier” for the new food

- Over time, decrease the size or amount of the vessel
Chaser

- Allow your child to choose a favorite beverage that (s)he uses as a “chaser” to help swallow the new food
- Over time, decrease the use of the chaser
- Make sure your child only has access to the chaser when (s)he’s eating the new food
Dealing with meltdowns

- Are the expectations clear?

- Can you modify your expectations before meltdown occurs?

- Does your child have a way to request escape appropriately?
Don’t try to “sneak” new foods in; it will make kids untrusting about all foods you present

Only rely on incorporating pureed foods (e.g., zucchini, squash, etc.) if you are concerned about nutrition, and even then, don’t rely on this strategy alone—use another treatment simultaneously
Tips, cont.

- Don’t introduce more than one NPF at a time
- Don’t forget choices
- Reinforce your child for other meal-related behaviors
- Use visuals (pictures and gestures): save verbal language for praise
Most “typical” kids need to be exposed to a new food around 7-10 times before they are willing to try it.

Don’t give up!