

# Feeding picky eaters plus some recipes



Photo credit: Lexi Logan

Back by popular demand: our picky eater post, with bonus recipes at the end.

*"You just don't appreciate a picky eater until you have one."*  
—Overheard at Dr. Lai's dinner table

**Picky eaters come in two major varieties.**

One kind is the child who eats the same foods every day and will not vary her diet. For example, breakfast is always the same cereal with milk and a banana, lunch is always peanut

butter and jelly, and dinner is some form of chicken, rice, and peas. This diet is nutritionally complete (fruit, vegetable, protein, dairy, carbohydrate) but is boring to the parent.

The other kind of picky eater is the child who leaves out entire food groups, most commonly vegetables or meat, or leaves out meals, such as always eats breakfast but never eats dinner.

My twins, when younger, ranged from the One Who Tried Anything to the One Who Refused Everything! My oldest child lived on cheerios and peanut butter and jelly for about two years, but now he eats crab legs and bulgur wheat and sushi. My point: I feel your frustration, and I will give you advice that works as well as optimism and a new way of thinking about feeding your children.

**Fortunately, from a medical point of view, toddler/children nutrition needs to be complete as you look over several days, not just one meal.** For example, if every three days your child has eaten some fruit, vegetables, protein, dairy, and complex carbs, then nutritional needs are met and your child will thrive. Of course, if your child's pediatrician has determined that your child is not growing appropriately, you may need to look "beyond the picky" into medical causes and treatments of poor growth.

### **Ways to outwit, outplay, and outlast picky eaters**

- 1. Never let them know you care about what they eat.** If you struggle with your child at mealtimes, she will not eat and you will continue to feel bad about her not eating. Talk about the day, not about the food, at mealtime. You want your child to eat for the simple reason that she feels hungry, not to please you or anyone else, and not because she feels glad or mad or sad. Also, refrain from cooking a "special meal" for your toddler. Typically

once a toddler catches on that you desperately want her to eat your cooking, she will refuse it.

2. **Do let them help you cook.** Even young children can wash vegetables and fruit, arrange food on platters, mix, pour, and sprinkle ingredients. Older kids can practice reading aloud from recipes and can help measure. Kids are more apt to taste what they help create.
3. **Let them dip their food** into salad dressing, apple sauce, ketchup, etc., which can make their food more appealing or interesting to eat.
4. **Hide more nutritious food in the foods they already like.** For example, carefully mix vegetables into meatballs or meatloaf or into macaroni and cheese. Bright green smoothies hiding kale and other greens are very popular. See the recipes at the end of this post for Zucchini chocolate chip muffins and Magic Soup.
5. **Remember to offer foods that YOU do NOT like**— your kids might like them! Here is an example: When my children were toddlers, we decorated Easter eggs at Dr. Lai's house with her children. My kids asked if they could eat their decorated hard boiled eggs. Understand that hard boiled eggs is one food that I do NOT like. I don't like their smell, their texture, and I really do not like the way they taste. Yet, all three of my kids, including my pickiest, loved those hard boiled eggs dipped in a little salt. Go figure. I had found an inexpensive, easy, healthy protein source to offer, even though I can't stand the way my kitchen smells when I cook them.. but hey, if my kids actually EAT them...
6. **In the same vein, offer foods that you assume they will not like.** Dr. Lai was shocked to find that her pickiest eater enjoyed hot and spicy food.
7. **Continue to offer foods even if your picky eater refuses them.** Don't force feed, just have them on the table. It could take 20 or 30 exposures before your kids might try them so do not despair. It took EIGHT YEARS of exposure

to broccoli (one of my personal favorite vegetables) until two of my three kids decided they love it too. One still does not eat it. And that's ok.

8. **Hunger is the best sauce.** Refrain from offering junk food as snacks or as reward for eating "real" food. Pretzels, crackers, cookies, candy, cake, and chips have NO nutritional value yet fill up small bellies quickly. Your insightful child will HOLD OUT for the junk and refuse good nutrition if they know they can fill up on snacks later. Along the same line, avoid bribing food for food. Chances are, if you bribe eating vegetables with cookies, the focus for the rest of the meal will be on the cookies and a tantrum will follow. You and your child will have belly aches from stress rather than full bellies. While it is tempting to let your child gaze all day, this will simply fill your child up so that she does not feel hunger at a meal or snack. Beware, even water can suppress the appetite.
9. **If the goal is to have your children eat real food, then avoid "fake food."** Pouches with pureed fruit/veggie/cereal combos, fruit bars, fruit juice, protein shakes, and Puffs all may have nutrients but often have much sugar that grazes teeth and do not teach young taste buds the texture and flavors of healthier versions of actual fruits, vegetables, cereal, and protein sources such as meat.
10. **It is okay to repeat similar meals day after day as long as they are nutritious.** We might like variety as grownups but many toddlers and young kids prefer sameness and predictability.
11. **Avoid becoming a "short order" chef.** Picky eaters quickly take advantage of their power to make parents prepare multiple meals and likely end up not eating anyway. When your child says "I don't want this! I want something else!" at breakfast, lunch, or dinner, you can answer calmly but firmly, "The meal is on the table." It's okay if they eat only one of the foods on

the table. Next week she might try another. A different approach that some families use is to have one back-up meal that is the same every day for every meal and must be completely non-cook and nutritious. Examples are low sugar cereal and milk, peanut butter and jelly sandwich, yogurt with nuts or fruit mixed in, etc. that you agree to serve if your child does not want to eat what the rest of the family is eating.

12. **You can give your child a pediatric multivitamin.** This tactic is not giving up or cheating. It can give the Parent as Provider of Nutrients peace of mind. You can give the multivitamin every day or just on the days that you are convinced that your child has eaten nothing.
13. **Read *Green Eggs and Ham*, by Dr. Seuss,** to your young picky eater. It stars a picky eater who becomes convinced to “try them.” You may, however, need to learn to make green eggs!

### **Zucchini muffins ( or just call them “green muffins”)**

3 cups flour, 1Tbs baking powder, 1 tsp salt, 1/2 tsp baking soda 1 1/2 tsp cinnamon, 1/2 tsp nutmeg

2 eggs, 1/2 cup low-fat milk, 1/2 cup canola or vegetable oil, 1 cup sugar, 2 cups shredded zucchini – approximately 2 medium zucchinis- leave skins ON. OPTIONAL (but yummy): 1/2 cup mini chocolate chips

Preheat oven to 375F.

Stir together flour, baking powder, salt, baking soda, cinnamon, and nutmeg.

In separate bowl, beat eggs with electric mixer x 1 minute. Beat in milk, oil, and sugar. Stir in zucchini until well blended.

Add flour mixture to batter a bit at a time and stir to mix.

Mix in chocolate chips, if desired.

Spoon into greased muffin tins or place paper muffin liners, sprinkle tops of batter with a bit of sugar or “cinnamon sugar”

Bake 20 minutes, or until tops are golden brown and spring back when you touch them.

### **Magic Soup recipe**

Take a large soup pot. Add raw chicken parts (breasts, thighs-bones add to the flavor) and cover with water.

Add onion, carrots, celery, cauliflower.

Flavor with salt, small amount of pepper, and any spice you like- I use tarragon but you can also use cilantro, parsley, curry powder, ginger.

Bring to boil, then cover and simmer for approximately 2 hours. toward the end, add some nappa (Chinese cabbage) or regular cabbage, cook until cabbage is wilted.

Serve to picky eaters: pull out the soft chicken pieces to pick up, pull out cooked vegetables – good finger food as well. Serve the broth in a cup. Most vitamins are water soluble, which means that even if your child only drinks the soup or if you pour the soup over something your child already likes such as noodles or rice, they are still getting all of the nutrition from your soup (hence, “magic soup”).

Julie Kardos, MD with Naline Lai, MD

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**Fortunately, from a medical point of view, toddler/child nutrition needs to be complete as you look over several days, not just one meal.** For example, if every 3 days your child has eaten some fruit, some vegetables, some protein, some dairy,

and some complex carbohydrates, then nutritional needs are met and your child will thrive!

## **Twelve ways to outwit, outplay, and outlast picky eaters**

1) **Never let them know you care about what they eat.** If you struggle with your child about eating, she will not eat and you will continue to feel bad about her not eating. Talk about the day, not about the food on the table. You want your child to eat for the simple reason that she feels hungry, not to please you or anyone else, and not because she feels glad or mad or sad or because of what you the parent will feel if she eats or doesn't eat. Along these lines, NEVER cook a "special meal" for your toddler. I can guarantee that when she knows how desperately you want her to eat your cooking, she will refuse it.

2) **Let them help cook.** Even young children can wash vegetables and fruit, arrange food on platters, and mix, pour, and sprinkle ingredients. Older kids can read recipes out loud for you and measure ingredients. Kids are more apt to taste what they help create.

3) **Let them dip their food** into salad dressing, apple sauce, ketchup etc., which can make their food more appealing or interesting to eat.

4) **Let them pick their own food.** Whether you grow your own foods, visit a farm or just let your kids help you in the supermarket, kids often get a kick out of tasting what they pick.



5) **Hide more nutritious food in the foods they already like (without them knowing).** For example, carefully mix vegetables into meatballs or meatloaf or into macaroni and cheese. Let me know if you want my recipe for zucchini chocolate chip muffins or Magic Soup.

6) **Offer them foods that you don't like**—THEY might like it. Here's an example: a few years ago, my children were decorating Easter eggs with Dr. Lai's children. My kids asked if they could eat their decorated hard boiled eggs. Now, hard boiled eggs are one of the few foods that I do NOT like. I don't like their smell, their texture, and I really don't like the way they taste. Yet, all three of my kids, including my pickiest, loved those hard boiled eggs dipped in a little bit of salt. Go figure. Now I have an inexpensive, easy, healthy protein source to offer even though I can't stand the way my kitchen smells when I cook them... but hey, if my kids actually will EAT them...

7) **Continue to offer foods even if they are refused.** Don't force feed; just have them on the table. It could take 20 -30 exposures before your kids might try them so don't despair. It took eight years of exposure to broccoli until two of my three kids decided they loved it.

8) **Hunger is the best sauce.** Do not offer junk food as snacks. Pretzels, crackers, cookies, candy, and chips have NO nutritional value yet fill up small bellies quickly. Do not waste precious stomach space with junk because your insightful child will HOLD OUT for the junk and refuse good nutrition if they know they can fill up on snacks later. Along these lines, never bribe food for food. Chances are, if you bribe eating vegetables with dessert, all the focus will be on the dessert and a tantrum will follow. You and your child will have belly

aches from stress, not full bellies.

9) **It is okay to repeat similar meals day after day as long as they are nutritious.** We might like variety as grownups but most toddlers and young kids prefer sameness and predictability.

10) **Turn off the TV.** Trust me and trust numerous scientific behavioral studies on this, while it sometimes works in the short term, it never works in the long term. In addition, watching TV during meals is antisocial and promotes obesity.

11) **Do not become a "short order" chef.** If you do, your child will take advantage of you and likely will not end up eating anyway. When your child says, "I don't want this dinner/lunch/breakfast, I want something else," you say "The meal is on the table."

One variation of this that works in some families is to have one back-up meal that is the same every day and for every meal and must be completely non-cook and nutritious, for example, a very low sugar cereal and milk, peanut butter and jelly sandwich, or yogurt with nuts or fruit mixed in it, etc, that you agree to serve if your child does not want to eat what the rest of the family is eating.

12) **You can give your child a pediatric multivitamin.** This tactic is not "giving up," nor is it cheating, and it can give the Parent as Provider of Nutrients peace of mind. You can either give a multivitamin every day or just on the days that you are convinced that your child has eaten nothing.

If all else fails, your consolation is that your child will likely become a parent of a picky eater too, and she will ask you how to cope. You'll be able to tell her what worked for you when she was a picky eater.

Julie Kardos, MD with Naline Lai, MD

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*Originally posted on July 24, 2009, with modifications*

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# Chatting with Janet Zappala: Food for Thought Episode-help for overweight kids and picky eaters

In case you missed the live internet radio show- hit the arrow to tune in here:

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## Picky Eaters

We have an updated version of this post with some recipes as well. Please read it here.

Link added 8/2019

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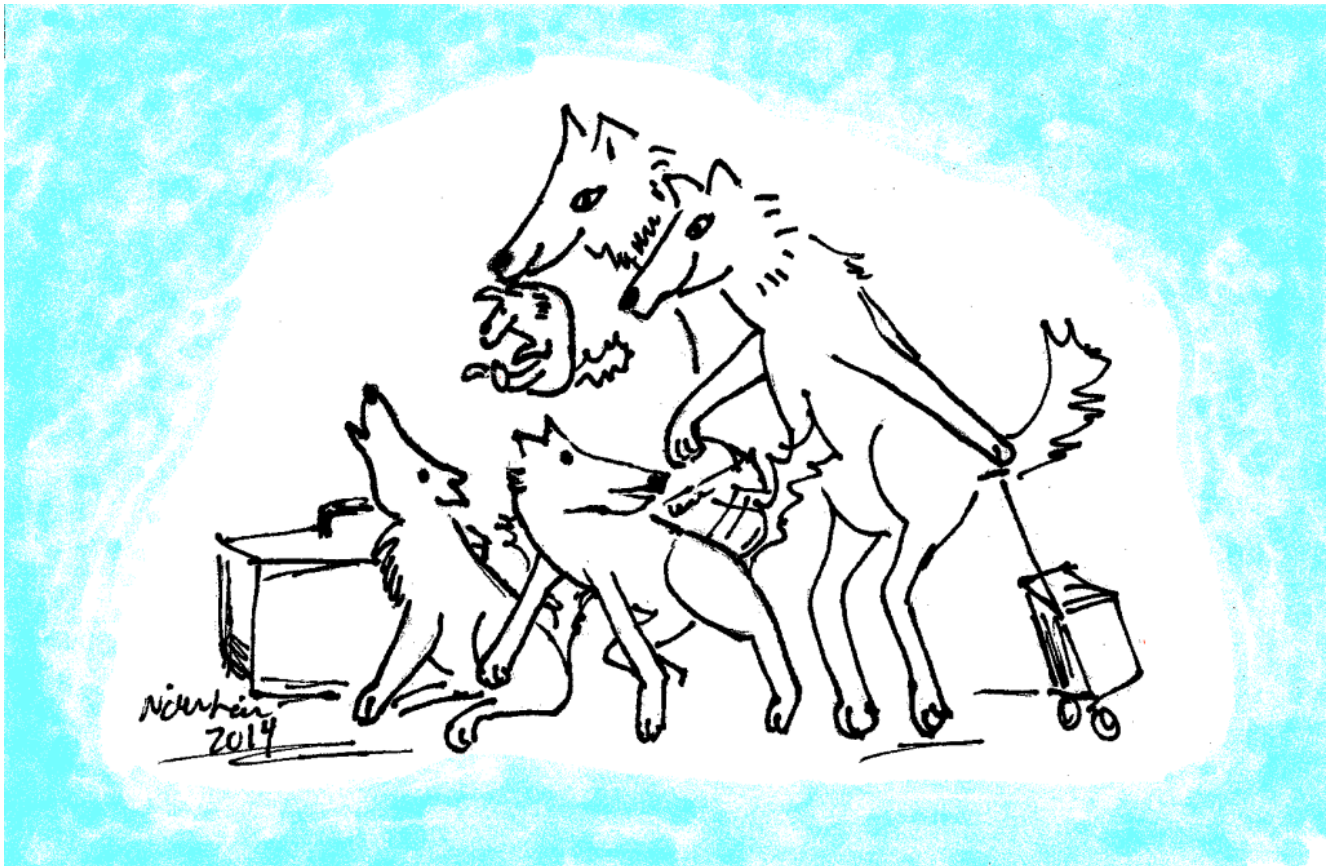
And if all else fails, just remember someday, your child will probably become a parent of a picky eater too, and she will consult ask you how to cope. You’ll be able to tell her what worked for you when she was a picky eater.

Julie Kardos, MD and Naline Lai, MD

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# **Parent guide to traveling with young children for the holidays**



*In spite of the long TSA lines, rental car challenges and all the howling,  
the wolf family made sure they got to grandmother's house every year.*

Do you plan to travel with young children this holiday season? You won't appreciate how much your baby has grown until you attempt a diaper change on a plane. For families, any holiday can become stressful when traveling with young children is involved. Often families travel great distances to be together and attend parties that run later than their children's usual bedtimes. Fancy food and fancy dress are common. Well-meaning relatives who see your children once a year can be too quick to hug and kiss, sending even not-so-shy kids running. Here are some tips for safer and smoother holiday travel.

## Before you travel

**Identify the nearest children's hospital, urgent care center, or pediatrician** who is willing to see out-of-town new



patients. This way, if your child becomes ill enough to need medical care while you are away from home, you will already know where to go. Also be sure that your children are up to date on all recommended vaccines. You wouldn't want your child to receive a "gift" of flu or whooping cough on your travels.

## **Traveling with young children: flying**

**Not all kids develop ear pain on planes as they descend-** some sleep right through landing. However, if needed you can offer pacifiers, bottles, drinks, or healthy snacks during take-off and landing because swallowing may help prevent pressure buildup and thus discomfort in the ears. And yes, it is okay to fly with an ear infection.

**Refrain from offering Benadryl (diphenhydramine)** as a way of "insuring" sleep during a flight. Kids can have paradoxical reactions and become hyper instead of sleepy, and even if they do become sleepy, the added stimulation of flying can combine to produce an ornery, sleepy, tantrum-prone kid. Usually the drone of the plane is enough to sooth kids into slumber.

## **Traveling with young children: poor sleepers and picky eaters**

**Traveling 400 miles away from home to spend a few days with close family and/or friends is not the time to solve your child's chronic problems.** Let's say you have a child who is a poor sleeper and climbs into your bed every night at home. Knowing that even the best of sleepers often have difficulty sleeping in a new environment, just take your "bad sleeper" into your bed at bedtime and avoid your usual home routine of waking up every hour to walk her back into her room. Similarly, if you have a picky eater, pack her favorite portable meal as a backup for fancy dinners. One exception

about problem solving to consider is when you are trying to say bye-bye to the binkie or pacifier.

**Supervise your child's eating** and do not allow your child to overeat while you catch up with a distant relative or friend. Ginger-bread house vomit is DISGUSTING, as Dr. Kardos found out first-hand years ago when one of her children ate too much of the beautiful and generously-sized ginger bread house for dessert.

Speaking of food, **a good idea is to give your children a wholesome, healthy meal at home, or at your "home base,"** before going to a holiday party that will be filled with food that will be foreign to your children. Hunger fuels tantrums so make sure his appetite needs are met. Then, you also won't feel guilty letting him eat sweets at a party because he already ate healthy foods earlier in the day.

## **Avoid germ spread, but also keep perspective**

If you have a young baby, **take care to avoid losing control of your ability to protect your baby from germs.** Well-meaning family members love passing infants from person to person, smothering them with kisses along the way. Unfortunately, nose-to-nose kisses may spread cold and flu viruses along with holiday cheer.

On the flip side, there are some family events, such as having your 95-year-old great-grandfather meet your baby for the first time, that are once-in-a-lifetime. **So while you should be cautious on behalf of your child, ultimately, heed your heart.** At six weeks old, Dr. Lai's baby traveled several hours to see her grandfather in a hospital after he had a heart attack. Dr. Lai likes to think it made her father-in-law's recovery go more smoothly.

# Traveling with shy children

If you have a shy child, try to **arrive early** to the family gathering. This avoids the situation of walking into a house full of unfamiliar relatives or friends who can overwhelm him with their enthusiasm. Together, you and your shy child can explore the house, locate the toys, find the bathrooms, and become familiar with the party hosts. Then your child can greet guests, or can simply play alone first before you introduce him to guests as they arrive. If possible, spend time in the days before the gathering sharing family photos and stories to familiarize your child with relatives or friends he may not see often.

## It's ok to change course

Sometimes you have to remember that **once you have children, their needs come before yours**. Although you eagerly anticipated a holiday reunion, your child may be too young to appreciate it for more than a couple of hours. An ill, overtired child makes everyone miserable. If your child has an illness, is tired, won't use the unfamiliar bathroom, has eaten too many cookies and has a belly ache, or is in general crying, clingy, and miserable despite your best efforts, just leave the party. You can console yourself that when your child is older his actions at that gathering will be the impetus for family legends, or at least will make for a funny story.

## Holiday travel is special for children

**Enjoy your CHILD's perspective of holidays!** Enjoy their pride in learning new customs, their enthusiasm for opening gifts, their joy in playing with cousins they seldom see, their excitement in reading holiday books, and their happiness as they spends extra time with you. This experience makes

traveling with young children worth the extra planning.

We wish you all the best this holiday season!

Julie Kardos, MD and Naline Lai, MD

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Updated from 2017

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# Why Won't My One-year-old Eat?



Photo by Karolina Grabowska on Pexels.com

Remember when feeding your baby was fun? They way he opened his mouth like a baby bird when you fed him oatmeal. They way she thumped her hands on the high chair tray waiting for another bite of mashed bananas. It was hard not to laugh as

your nine-month-old slowly picked up each piece of pancake and chewed thoughtfully, or the way your eleven-month-old, covered in tomato sauce, double fistful a messy meal of cut up meatballs and elbow noodles. And then they turned one. You call your pediatrician and search the internet to ask, why won't my one-year-old eat?

Maybe they actually did not stop eating entirely, but instead of the serene or comic meals you used to enjoy with your baby in the high chair, you now have a one-year-old who deliberately deposits each pea off of the high chair tray and onto the floor, smooshes their potatoes all over the plate, or thrashes like a chained-up wild beast to escape their high chair. You fluster, you offer other previously enjoyed foods, you become convinced they will starve, you offer a cookie, you offer more milk, you cry.

Let us reassure you: your one-year-old most likely is acting in a normal and predictable way. In this post, we explain why many one-year-olds seem to stop eating, and how to handle your suddenly picky, food-averse one-year-old.

Recall that we pediatricians expected your newborn to gain one pound every other week. In contrast, we expect your one-year-old to gain one pound every THREE MONTHS! Your baby is now growing at a slower rate. Correspondingly, their appetites slow down.

Have you heard the saying, "Hunger is the best sauce?" The way to help your one-year-old to eat, and to avoid disordered eating, is to allow them to feel hungry. Typical toddler appetites vary from day to day. Some days they eat as much as you, and sometimes they subsist on air! Most of them thrive anyway. One reason you have pediatrician visits every 3 months with your one-year-old is to be sure they gain weight

appropriately.

**Here are some Do's and Don'ts:**

- DO offer the same structured meal times that you had as a child: breakfast, lunch, dinner, and one or two snacks a day. That's plenty of opportunity to eat.
  - DO make mealtime enjoyable. Gather your family together to eat as often as you can. Talk about the day, joke a bit, serve whatever you are eating as long as there are no choking hazards. To avoid frustration, include at least one item – fruit, veggie, protein, carb, or dairy–that you are fairly sure your child will eat.
  - DO serve bite sized food in small portions and allow your child to ask for more.
  - DO allow your child to enjoy your company while you enjoy theirs, *even if your child eats nothing*. Respect their short attention span and allow them to go play after a few minutes of not eating anything. They can play on the floor near you while you finish your meal.
  - Most importantly, DO pretend that you feel fine if they eat and fine if they don't eat. Of course you will care, but your only job is to present healthy food. It is your child's job to decide if they will eat and how much they will eat.
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- Avoid letting your child graze from a bottle, breasts, or sippy cup all day. Sucking fluid is a habit. Drinking from a cup at mealtime satisfies thirst. Filling a small toddler belly with fluid all day wards off hunger and almost guarantees that your child will have no room for actual food at meal time.
  - Likewise, giving food as a reward or as an activity between meals and snack times will also fill them up before it's time to actually eat.
  - Avoid chasing them with food as they play or offering

food while they watch a video. While this might work for a brief time, ultimately it does not improve their eating. Instead, it teaches them to eat *for you* or *for the video*, but not *for hunger*. This practice can lead to disordered eating patterns.

- Avoid feeding them or nursing them in the middle of the night. If you feed them anything substantial, you fill their bellies and they may not be hungry for breakfast in the morning. Besides, you wouldn't drink something in the middle of the night without brushing your teeth. Do the same for your child.
- Avoid too many choices. Offer the foods you have already prepared for the rest of the family, and leave the choice of "to eat or not to eat" to your toddler.

We invite you to read more about how to outwit, outplay, and outlast **picky eaters** here.

Read about many aspects of **one-year-old development**, including food refusal, here.

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# Holy Cannoli, Two Peds in a Pod® turns ten!



This little ten-month-old wishes Two Peds in a Pod® a happy ten-YEAR-old birthday!

Let's take a stroll back ten years to 2009. Ten years ago Facebook was just five years old. Back then there was no Instagram (2010), no Pinterest (2010), no Snapchat (2011). People were mesmerized by virtual vegetable picking (FarmVille) and taking care of Zhu Zhu pets. Bulky video gaming consoles ruled. The "New" Super Mario Bros. Wii really was "new." Apple's "pile of poo" emoji had just arrived the



year before. And ten years ago, Two Peds in a Pod® was born. The idea that doctors would write advice on the internet was so novel that even NPR thought the concept worthy of a story. Today we take a Happy Birthday look back at our first five posts:

### **Then and now**

Our blog's first five posts, from the summer of 2009, include the very same topics parents ask us about now in the summer of 2019.

Back then parents wondered about infant sleep, or lack thereof. Please note that we began our infant sleep podcast with the reminder that newborns are not meant to sleep through the night. Fisher Price should have listened to our podcast, because now in 2019 we are writing about rock' n play recalls.

Two posts tackled **Potty training** and **picky eating**. Spoiler to both posts: you can lead a horse to water but you can't make him drink! These days, we're still talking about both topics in the office. But now, people also ask about the need for probiotics to regulate bowels and digestive health in their child. Unfortunately, in 2019 probiotics have not panned out to be the hoped-for panacea for all gastrointestinal ailments. But they are helpful in some types of diarrhea.

In 2019 we talked about the tick borne illness **Lyme disease** and we're still talking about ticks now. As for the **mystery object** Dr. Lai found in a drawer, ten years later the models are kinder and sport a raised lip instead of a contraption that can break off.

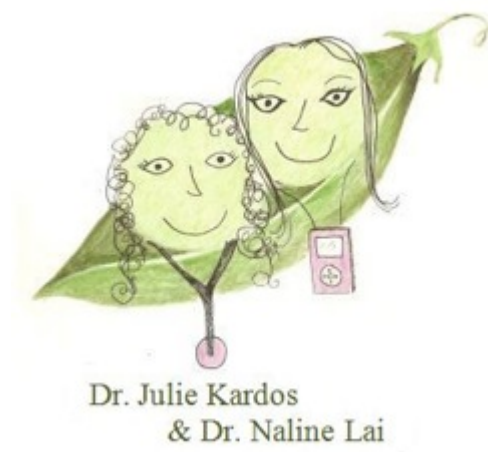
### **Blog writing a decade later**

Internet traffic has grown exponentially. Possibly because of so many sources of misinformation, we see more and more anxious parents who receive conflicting information about how to raise

their kids. We depend on you to let your friends know about this site. We would rather spend more time on writing than on search engine optimization. Despite the congested writing climate, our mission (read our maiden voyage) remains the same, to bring you practical pediatric advice. What fuels us? Our intense and comprehensive pediatric training from Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, our combined **over forty years** of practicing pediatrics, and our passion for helping children and their families, give us the experience and the motivation to continue to help all of you whether online or in our offices.

### **A last blast from the past**

How many of you remember our initial logo penned by the combined efforts of Dr. Kardos's brother and her sister-in-law? That's an iPod dangling from Dr. Lai's neck-remember those?



It's good to be ten.

Julie Kardos, MD and Naline Lai, MD

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# Top parenting New Year's resolutions 2018



A lot of life's issues boil down to the essentials...eat, sleep, drink, pee, poop, love and learn... for your child and yourself.

We are here to help you to carry out your parenting New Year's resolutions in all of these areas.

1- **Eat** Resolve to help your picky eater become less picky. Become more patient and creative in helping your children eat new foods.

2- **Sleep** Resolve to fix your child's sleep problems. Help create a reasonable bedtime routine for your baby and end night time awakenings, and help your tired teen get better sleep.

3- **Drink** This year resolve to wean your toddler from the bottle/breast to a cup.

3- **Pee** Resolve to help your child avoid urine accidents and gain a better understanding of bed-wetting.

4- **Poop** For parents of newborns: resolve to help your gassy baby. For parents of toddlers: resolve to end the battle of the potty and encourage your child to potty train in a peaceful, non punitive and non-controlling way. Help solve your child's tendency to hold onto poop, which leads to constipation.

5- **Love and Learn** to understand your child's developmental abilities in order to discipline appropriately and have reasonable expectations. Learn how and when to use "time out." For your teen, learn how to talk with them. Help your child learn to "go it alone," and calm test/school work anxiety.

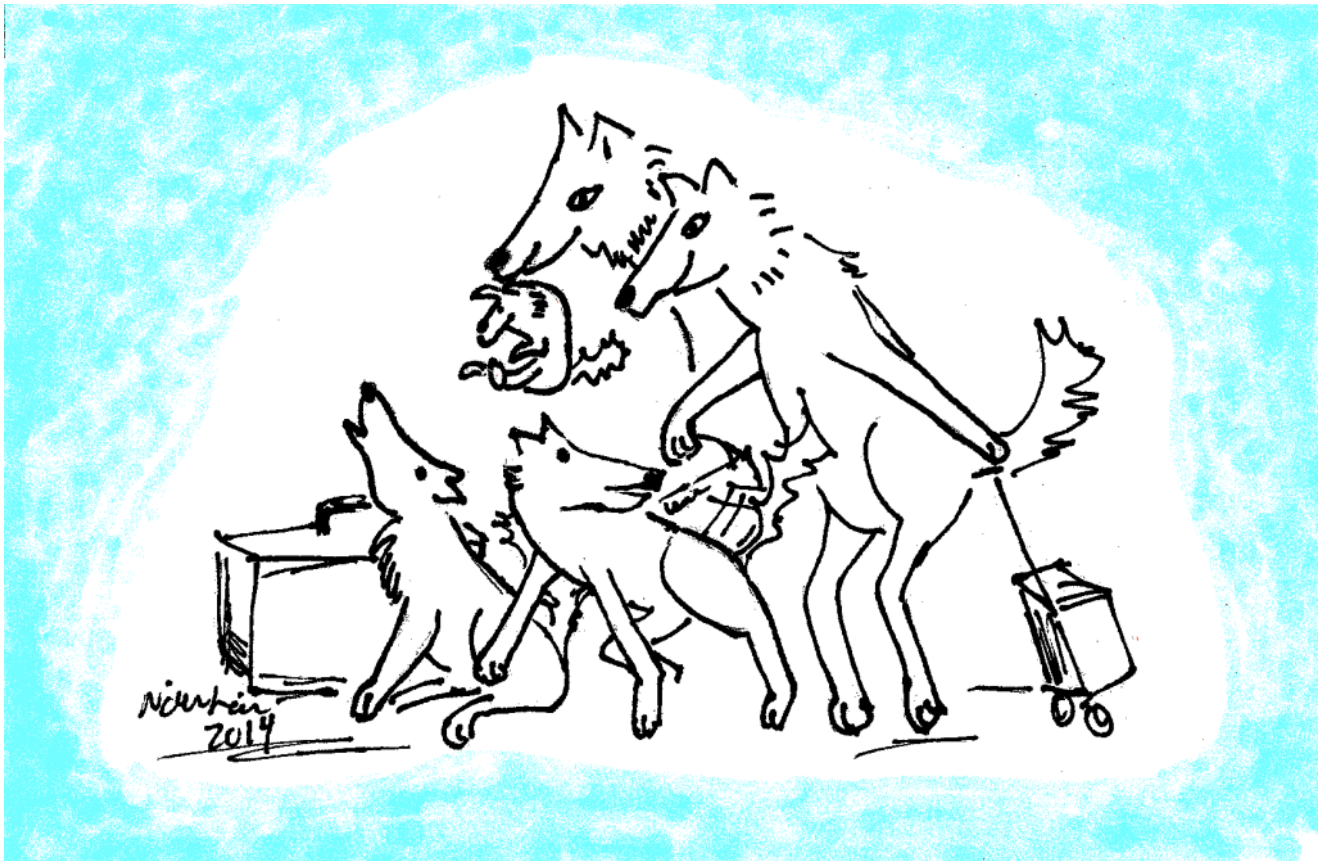
As for us, we resolve to continue to be your source of dependable pediatric advice. We resolve to keep current with pediatric advances, remain honest, and treat your family with respect and care as we help you grow your children into confident, independent adults.

Wishing you health and peace in the New Year,  
Drs. Kardos and Lai



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# Guide to traveling with young children for the holidays



*In spite of the long TSA lines, rental car challenges and all the howling,  
the wolf family made sure they got to grandmother's house every year.*

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ow much your baby has grown until you attempt a diaper change on a plane. For families, any holiday can become stressful when traveling with young children is involved. Often families travel great distances to be together and attend parties that run later than their children's usual bedtimes. Fancy food and fancy dress are common. Well-meaning relatives who see your children once a year can be too quick to hug and kiss, sending even not-so-shy kids running. Here are some tips for safer and smoother holiday travel:

**If you are flying, refrain from offering Benadryl**

**(diphenhydramine)** as a way of “insuring” sleep during a flight. Kids can have paradoxical reactions and become hyper instead of sleepy, and even if they do become sleepy, the added stimulation of flying can combine to produce an ornery, sleepy, tantrum-prone kid. Usually the drone of the plane is enough to sooth kids into slumber.

Know also that **not all kids develop ear pain on planes as they descend**- some sleep right through landing. However, if needed you can offer pacifiers, bottles, drinks, or healthy snacks during take-off and landing because swallowing may help prevent pressure buildup and thus discomfort in the ears. And yes, it is okay to fly with an ear infection.

**Before you travel, identify the nearest children’s hospital, urgent care center, or pediatrician** who is willing to see out-of-town new patients, so that if your child becomes ill enough to need medical care while you are away from home, you will already know where to go.

**Traveling 400 miles away from home to spend a few days with close family and/or friends is not the time to solve your child’s chronic problems.** Let’s say you have a child who is a poor sleeper and climbs into your bed every night at home. Knowing that even the best of sleepers often have difficulty sleeping in a new environment, just take your “bad sleeper” into your bed at bedtime and avoid your usual home routine of waking up every hour to walk her back into her room. Similarly, if you have a picky eater, pack her favorite portable meal as a backup for fancy dinners. One exception about problem solving to consider is when you are trying to say bye-bye to the binkie or pacifier.

**Supervise your child’s eating** and do not allow your child to overeat while you catch up with a distant relative or friend. Ginger-bread house vomit is DISGUSTING, as Dr. Kardos found out first-hand when one of her children ate too much of the beautiful and generously-sized ginger bread house for dessert.

Speaking of food, **a good idea is to give your children a wholesome, healthy meal at home, or at your “home base,”** before going to a holiday party that will be filled with food that will be foreign to your children. Hunger fuels tantrums so make sure his appetite needs are met. Then, you also won't feel guilty letting him eat sweets at a party because he already ate healthy foods earlier in the day.

If you have a young baby, **take care to avoid losing control of your ability to protect your baby from germs.** Well-meaning family members love passing infants from person to person, smothering them with kisses along the way. Unfortunately, nose-to-nose kisses may spread cold and flu viruses along with holiday cheer.

On the flip side, there are some family events, such as having your 95-year-old great-grandfather meet your baby for the first time, that are once-in-a-lifetime. **So while you should be cautious on behalf of your child, ultimately, heed your heart.** At six weeks old, Dr. Lai's baby traveled several hours to see her grandfather in a hospital after he had a heart attack. Dr. Lai likes to think it made her father-in-law's recovery go more smoothly.

**If you have a shy child,** try to **arrive early** to the family gathering. This avoids the situation of walking into a house full of unfamiliar relatives or friends who can overwhelm him with their enthusiasm. Together, you and your shy child can explore the house, locate the toys, find the bathrooms, and become familiar with the party hosts. Then your child can become a greeter, or can simply play alone first before you introduce him to guests as they arrive. If possible, spend time in the days before the gathering sharing family photos and stories to familiarize your child with relatives or friends he may not see often.

Sometimes you have to remember that **once you have children, their needs come before yours.** Although you eagerly

anticipated a holiday reunion, your child may be too young to appreciate it for more than a couple of hours . An ill, overtired child makes everyone miserable. If your child has an illness, is tired, won't use the unfamiliar bathroom, has eaten too many cookies and has a belly ache, or is in general crying, clingy, and miserable despite your best efforts, just leave the party. You can console yourself that when your child is older his actions at that gathering will be the impetus for family legends, or at least will make for a funny story.

**Enjoy your CHILD's perspective of holidays:** enjoy his pride in learning new customs, his enthusiasm for opening gifts, his joy in playing with cousins he seldom sees, his excitement in reading holiday books, and his happiness as he spends extra time with you, his parents.

We wish you all the best this holiday season!

Julie Kardos, MD and Naline Lai, MD

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Updated from our 2009, 2014, and 2015 articles on these topics

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## **A guide for parents of one-year-olds**



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## 1 Year - Hands you a book when he wants to hear a story



Learn the Signs.  
Act Early.



U.S. Department of Health  
and Human Services  
Centers for Disease  
Control and Prevention

[cdc.gov/Milestones](https://cdc.gov/Milestones)

e, you'll realize he has a much stronger will. My oldest threw his first tantrum the day he turned one. At first, we puzzled: why was he suddenly lying face down on the kitchen floor? The indignant crying that followed clued us to his anger. "Oh, it's a tantrum," my husband and I laughed, relieved.

**Parenting one-year-olds requires the recognition that your child innately desires to become independent of you.** Eat, drink, sleep, pee, poop: eventually your child will learn to control these basics of life by himself. We want our children to feed themselves, go to sleep when they feel tired, and pee and poop on the potty. Of course, there's more to life such as playing, forming relationships, succeeding in school, etc, but we all need the basics. The challenge comes in recognizing when to allow your child more independence and when to reinforce your authority.

Here's the mantra: **Parents provide unconditional love while they simultaneously make rules, enforce rules, and decide when**

**rules need to be changed.** Parents are the safety officers and provide food, clothing, and a safe place to sleep. Parents are teachers. Children are the sponges and the experimenters. Here are concrete examples of how to provide loving guidance:

**Eating:** The rules for parents are to provide healthy food choices, calm mealtimes, and to enforce sitting during meals. The child must sit to eat. Walking while eating poses a choking hazard. Children decide how much, if any, food they will eat. They choose if they eat only the chicken or only the peas and strawberries. They decide how much of their water or milk they drink. By age one, they should be feeding themselves part or ideally all of their meal. By 18 months they should be able to use a spoon or fork for part of their meal.

If, however, parents continue to completely spoon feed their children, cajole their children into eating “just one more bite,” insist that their child can’t have strawberries until they eat their chicken, or bribe their children by dangling a cookie as a reward for eating dinner, then the child gets the message that independence is undesirable. They will learn to ignore their internal sensations of hunger and fullness.

For perspective, remember that newborns eat frequently and enthusiastically because they gain an ounce per day on average, or one pound every 2-3 **weeks**. A typical one-year-old gains about 5 pounds during his entire second year, or one pound every 2-3 **months**. Normal, healthy toddlers do not always eat every meal of every day, nor do they finish all meals. Just provide the healthy food, sit back, and [enjoy meal time with your toddler and the rest of the family.](#)

**A one-year-old child will throw food off of his high chair tray to see how you react.** Do you laugh? Do you shout? Do you do a funny dance to try to get him to eat his food? Then he will continue to refuse to eat and throw the food instead. If you say blandly, “I see you are full. Here, let’s get you down so you can play,” then he will do one of two things:

- 1) He will go play. He was not hungry in the first place.
- 2) He will think twice about throwing food in the future because whenever he throws food, you put him down to play. He will learn to eat the food when he feels hungry instead of throwing it.

**Sleep:** The rule is that parents decide on reasonable bedtimes and naptimes. The toddler decides when he actually falls asleep. Singing to oneself or playing in the crib is fine. Even cries of protest are fine. Check to make sure he hasn't pooped or knocked his binky out of the crib. After you change the poopy diaper/hand back the binky, LEAVE THE ROOM! Many parents tell me that "he just seems like he wants to play at 2:00am or he seems hungry." Well, this assessment may be correct, but remember who is boss. Unless your family tradition is to play a game and have a snack every morning at 2:00am, then just say "No, time for sleep now," and [ignore his protests](#).

**Pee/poop:** The rule is that parents keep bowel movements soft by offering a healthy diet. The toddler who feels pain when he poops will do his best not to have a bowel movement. Going into potty training a year or two from now [with a constipated child](#) can lead to many battles.

Even if your child does not show interest in potty training for another year or two, [talk up the advantages of putting pee and poop in the potty](#) as early as age one. Remember, repetition is how kids learn.

**Your one-year-old will test your resolve.** He is now able to think to himself, "Is this STILL the rule?" or "What will happen if I do this?" That's why he goes repeatedly to forbidden territory such as the TV or a standing lamp or plug outlet, stops when you say "No no!", smiles, and proceeds to reach for the forbidden object.

When you [feel exasperated by the number of times you need to redirect your toddler](#), remember that if toddlers learned

everything the first time around, they wouldn't need parenting. Permit your growing child to develop her emerging independence whenever safely possible. Encourage her to feed herself even if that is messier and slower. Allow her to fall asleep in her crib and resist only rocking her to sleep. Everyone deserves to learn how to fall asleep independently. You don't want to train a future insomniac adult.

And if you are baffled by your child's running away from you one minute and clinging to you the next, just think how confused your child must feel: she's driven towards independence on the one hand and on the other hand she knows she's wholly dependent upon you for basic needs. Above all else, remember the goal of parenthood is to help your child grow into a confident, independent adult... who remembers to call his parents every day to say good night... ok, at least once a week to check in.... ok, keep in touch with those who got him there!

Julie Kardos, MD with Naline Lai, MD

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