skills on the hill pediatric therapy

Picky Eater or Problem Feeder?

Knowing the difference - and when to get help

Almost every young child goes through picky phases. But for some kids, eating is a real struggle that affects nutrition, growth, and family stress. Here's how to tell them apart.

NOTICE | TRY | BUILD | CONNECT | GROW

Typical picky eating

Eats 30+ foods and tolerates new foods on the plate

Drops foods but adds them back; eats something from most food groups

Signs of a problem feeder

Eats fewer than 20 foods and loses foods without getting them back

Helpful idea

Refuses entire food groups or textures; melts down at new foods

Helpful idea

Eats completely different food from the rest of the family

Also worth watching

Gagging or choking, mealtime anxiety, very slow eating

Weight or growth concerns; grazes all day but won't sit for meals

What helps at home

Eat together and serve family-style; keep new foods low-pressure

Helpful idea

Offer a preferred food alongside; model eating; no bribing or forcing

Why early help matters

Feeding is sensory, motor, and behavioral all at once. Feeding therapy can turn mealtimes around.

Parent tip: Start small. Pick one idea that fits your family, practice it consistently, and build from there.