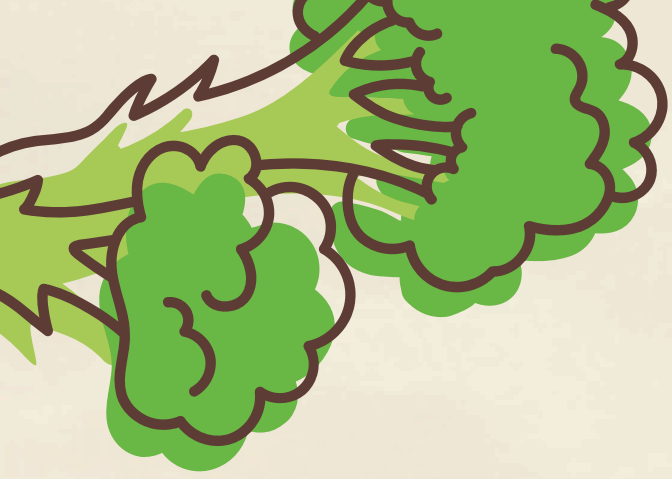




Practical Strategies for Autism & Picky Eating

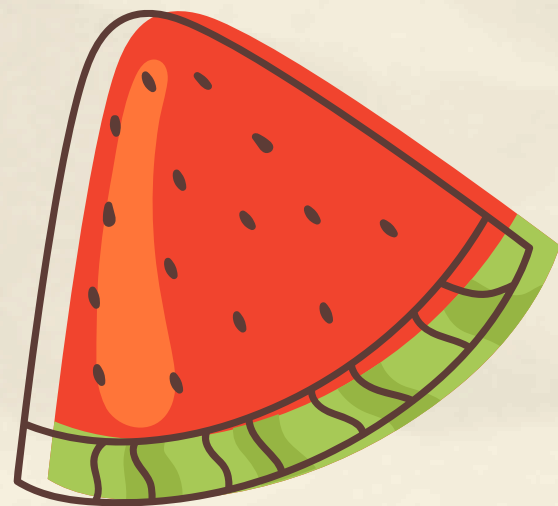
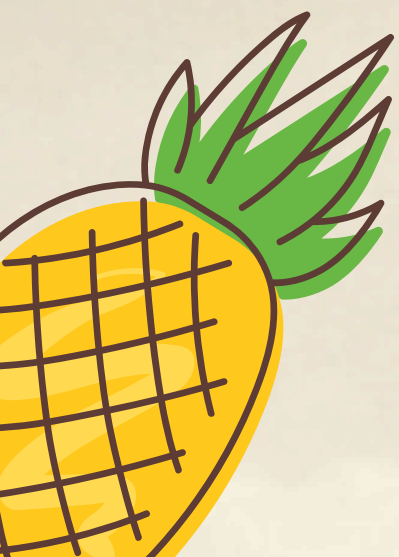
Masterclass with Dr. Rick

Richard Solomon MD
Medical Director
The PLAY Project



Overview

Why do children with ASD have eating issues?



-
- 1 **Medical considerations**

 - 2 **Family and Parenting:
PEP on the POP**

 - 3 **Sensory Causes of Poor Eating**

 - 4 **Developmental and Behavioral
Considerations**

 - 5 **Practical Tips for Helping the
Picky Eater**



Family and Parenting: PEP on the POP

PEP on

the POP



The most common cause of
'picky eating' is....

- Poor Eating Practices on the Part of Parents (aka: PEP on the POP)
- The most famous American Dietician —Ellyn Satter—says:

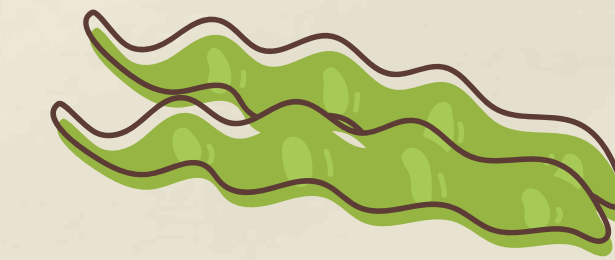
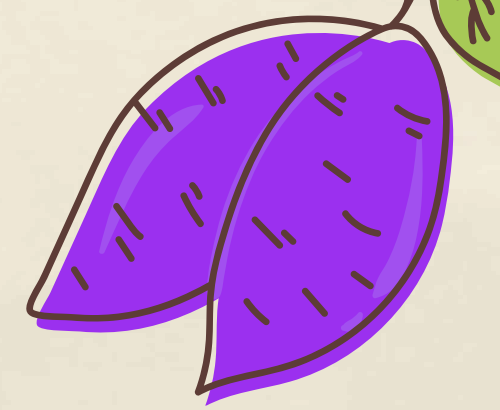
“It’s the parents’ job to put
good food on the table.

It’s the child’s job to eat.”



PEP on the POP: Poor Mealtime Practices

- Pressuring and conflict
- Parents use media to distract their child while feeding them. Without the media, they won't eat
- Parents feed their child beyond the age necessary
 - Common in certain cultures
- Chasing the child around the house with food
- Too much milk or milk substitutes (e.g. Pediasure)
- Making multiple meals



Fears leading to PEP on the POP



- **My child will starve.**
 - **False.**
 - **I can count on one hand the children who lost weight from non-medical reasons. Usually these are older children who have had years of eating issues.**
- **He'll go hungry!**
 - **True and then he'll eat if you put good tasting and high-quality food on his plate.**
- **I'll feel bad if he goes hungry.**
 - **True we all do. The question is: do you want your child to eat a broader array of healthy foods?**

PEP on the POP: Parent Psychology



Beware the 'message of incompetence'.

"You poor child with ASD, you can't handle a little hunger."

Beware of guilt

"I'm a bad parent if my child doesn't eat."



Sensory causes of poor eating

1

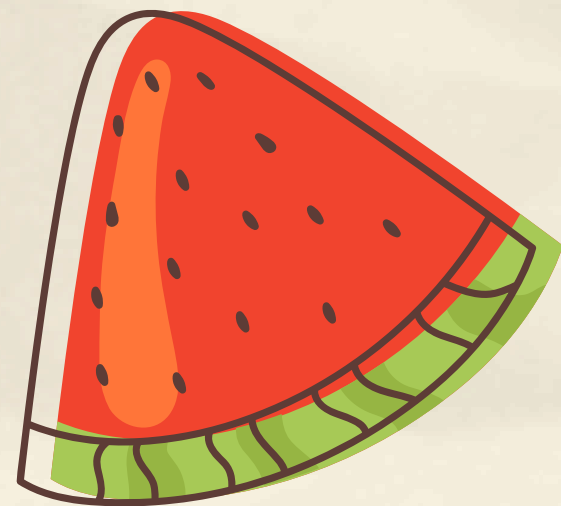
**Overstimulating/Chaotic
Environment**

2

**Tastes, textures,
temperature, & touch**

3

OCD



Taste, Textures, Temperature, & Touch



- **Taste:** Salty, sweet, sour, bitter, peppery, hot
- **Smell:** Bland vs strong
- **Temperature:** Hot, cold, warm
- **Look:** color, size, consistency, uniformity
- **Amount:** Don't overwhelm with too much on the plate
- **Touch:** Hard, gooey, soft, yucky
- **Texture:** Crunchy, smooth
- **Sound:** Loud, noisy, chaotic environments may hinder eating

OCD



- **Stubborn & wrong**
- **Perfectionistic, rigid, & particular**
- **True OCD**
- **Start with very small changes**
- **Use the “Tussle” technique**
- **See ‘desensitization’ protocol below (10 tips)**



"He/She won't sit at the dinner table."



- **Expand expected sit time g-r-a-d-u-a-l-l-y so success is built up slowly.**
- **Physical activity before they are asked to sit at a table might help.**
- **Set a timer to show more concretely that sitting is expected at mealtime, at least for a few minutes until the timer rings.**
- **Some children can sit and eat but can't wait for others**
 - **Special waiting toys or activities are okay (esp. at restaurants).**
 - **Something to read or a pocket-sized game or fidget to focus on**

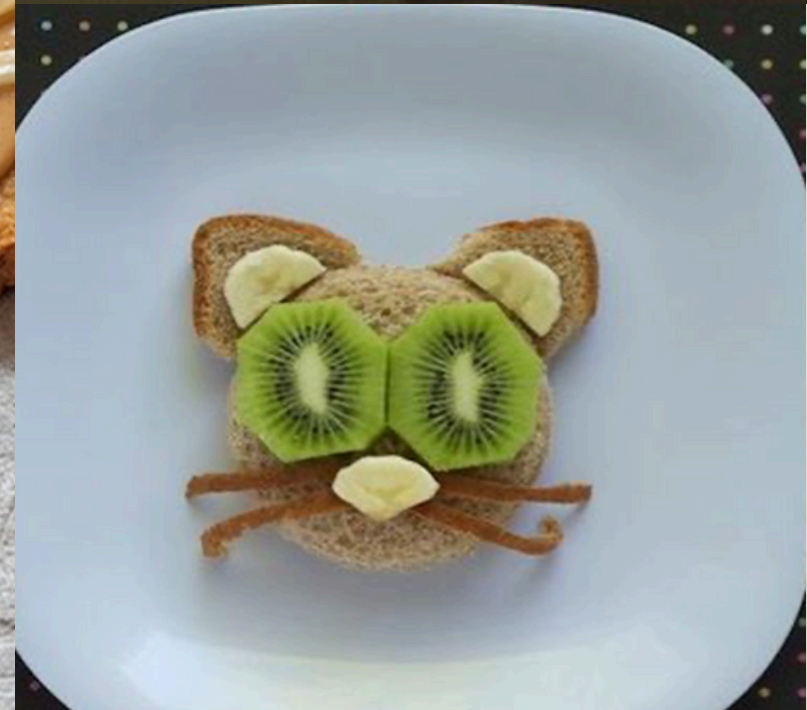
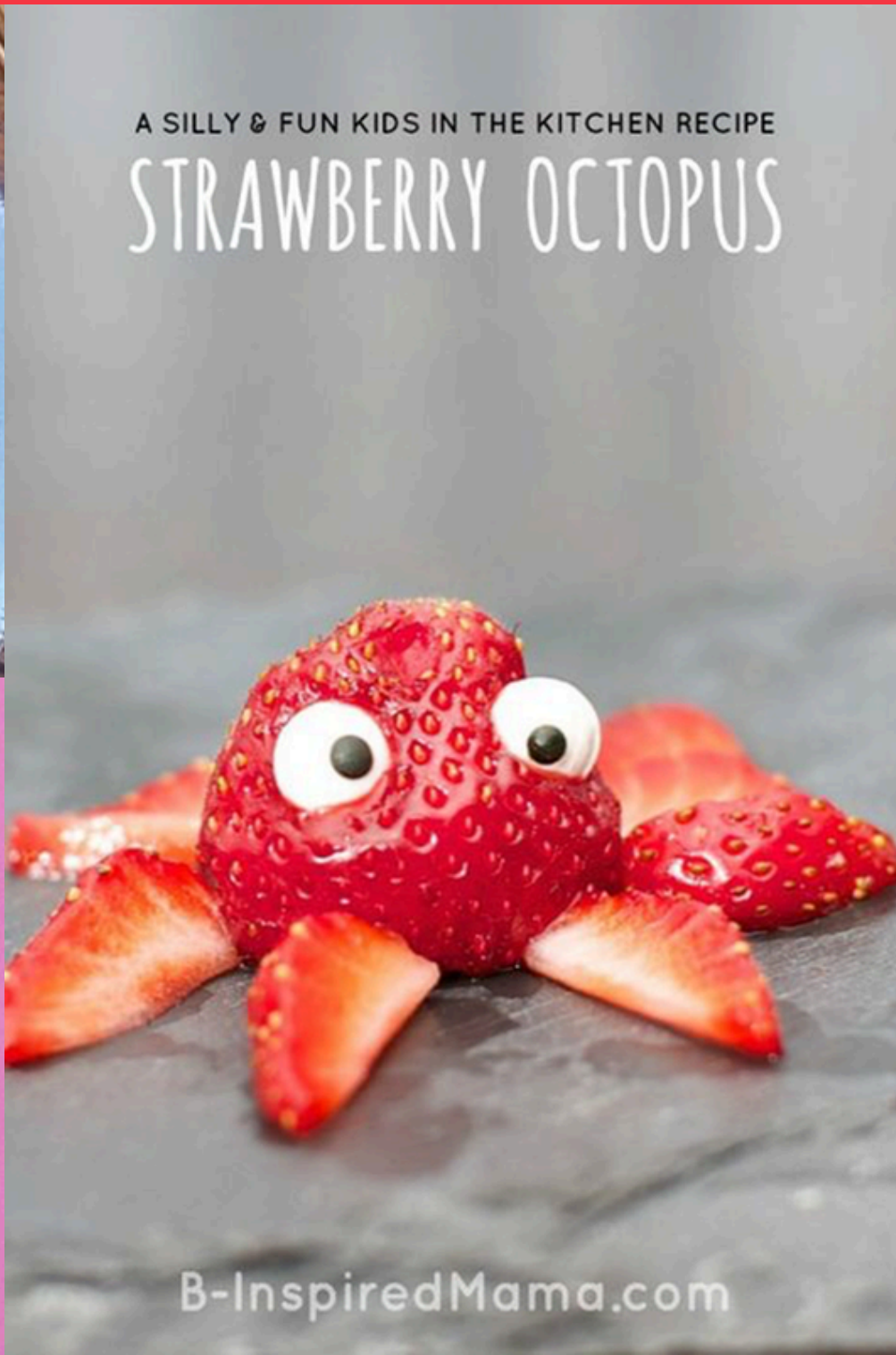
ASD & Eating: Developmental Considerations



- Transitions to the dinner table can be difficult.
- Reference: 'Dr. Rick's 20 Transition Tricks'
- As functional development increases, oppositionality and neophobia (few of the new) are normal.
 - They have real preferences.
 - But don't concede food territory easily.
 - Explain why eating good food is important
 - Keep putting good food on the plate.
 - Use oppositionality: "Don't you eat my (strawberry) nose!"
- Give some control and choices but don't fight over food.
- Make eating fun by being creative.



Fun Food Ideas



10 Practical Tips for Helping the Picky Eater



1. Parents job to put good food on the table and the child's job to eat

- **Keep the plate out and let them come back when they are hungry or...**
- **If the child won't eat the good food, offer them 1 (just one boring) alternate good food option like PB&J (i.e. Don't cook multiple meals)**

2. Prevention: 'Survival of the Tastiest'. The single most

- **Don't narrow food choices easily!**
- **But do give children several choices so they can feel in control of their meals**

3. PEP on the POP

- **If parents are fighting or anxious about eating, they are doing something wrong.**
- **Watch out for FEAR and GUILT. Help parents have faith in their children's hunger**
- **Behind every mother is a mother.**

10 Practical Tips for Helping the Picky Eater



4. If children have narrowed their diets, try: **Backward Chaining:**

- **Reintroduce food they ate before**
- **'Keep the World the Same': Keep all new foods 'similar but different' to old foods (crackers that are similar, etc.)**
- **Match foods by familiar color, texture & smell**
- **Mix the new food with a familiar and preferred food (but watch out if the child finds out you were 'tricking' them.**

5. **Make dinner time a fun family time**

- **If parents are fighting or anxious about eating, they are doing something wrong.**
- **Visually: Use fun finger foods to entice children to eat veggies**

10 Practical Tips for Helping the Picky Eater



6. Set up the sensory environment for success

- **Visually:** Use fun finger foods to entice children to eat veggies
- **Desensitize** (gradual and repeated daily exposures—it can take many exposures)
- **Simply look at the new food together**
- **Smell it**
- **Touch it / play with it (allowed!)**
- **Lick it once**
- **Then tasting, just a bite**
- **Consider a separate plate**
- **Small amounts are best**

7. Make dinner time a fun family time.

10 Practical Tips for Helping the Picky Eater



10 Practical Tips for Helping the Picky Eater



8. Talk to your child (if developmentally appropriate) about good food

- **Use a social story (Carol Gray)**
- **Use a fable describing a favorite character like Barney or Spiderman eating this particular food.**
- **Use modeling ("Hey Mikey, he likes it!")**
- **Take a video of daddy, mommy, or sibling eating and enjoying it**

9. Use a 5 Star reward system for tasting new foods

- **Just a tongue tip taste gets a star**
- **5 stars gets a prize**

10. Use the food the child wants as a reward for trying something new.

- **If you try this, then you can have that (if/then)**
- **And you will make mommy so happy (NO! The child should not eat to make your happy—this was a trick tip!)**

Success!





References & Resources

- Ellyn Satter, **Secrets of Feeding a Healthy Family**
- Ledford, J.R. & Gast, D.L. (2006). Feeding problems in children with autism spectrum disorders: A review. **Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities, 21, 153-166.**
- Baraskewich J, et al (2021) Feeding and eating problems in children and adolescents with autism: A scoping review. **Autism Vol. 25(6) 1505–1519 DOI: 10.1177/1362361321995631**
- Children's Hospital of Philadelphia
- <https://www.autismspeaks.org/expert-opinion/encouraging-picky-eaters-autism-try-new-foods>
- Autism Speaks
- <https://www.merakilane.com/autism-eating-8-tips-help-picky-eater-autism>
- Indiana Resource Center for Autism
- <https://www.iidc.indiana.edu/irca/articles/mealtime-and-children-on-the-autism-spectrum-beyond-picky-fussy-and-fads>
- Chat GPT—See handout

Upcoming Trainings



Advanced Course

- January 14-28
- Learn how to profile a child's development and unlock the **KEY** strategies to help a child make developmental progress and have fun!



Intensive Workshop Online

- February 4-25
- Get an overview of The PLAY Project methods and principles to gain skills in helping children with autism!



Intensive Course

- Take anytime you like!
- Discover how to effectively and playfully engage young children with autism, on your own time!

