Typical vs. Atypical Eating Patterns
Pediatric Feeding & Swallowing Disorders

Importance of Developing Healthy Feeding Patterns
Feeding and swallowing is an important aspect of child development. Adequate nutrition influences children's overall development. Healthy eating patterns including the intake of proteins, fats, carbohydrates, vitamins, and minerals support cognitive development, social engagement, and mood. Research has shown that the intake of vitamins and minerals also influences a child's vision, taste perception, and tactile processing.

Typical "Picky" Eating Habits
Children who are picky eaters have some feeding issues in specific areas. Typically, they like certain foods prepared in specific ways. These children will try new foods; however, they will demonstrate some resistance. If they lose interest in a food, they often return to that food at some point.

Atypical Eating Habits
Children who are problematic eaters have severe to profound restrictions in their diets. There are many reasons they demonstrate challenges eating. They tend to have very rigid feeding behaviors and often stop eating a food for a number of months. These children often refuse to eat entire food groups and/or food textures.

Risk Factors for Feeding and Swallowing Disorders
- Highly limited diet (e.g. only eats pasta, pudding, and blended foods)
- Refuses to eat entire food groups (e.g. proteins) or textures (e.g. chewy foods)
- Meals typically last longer than expected for the child's age
- Parents and child have adopted complex and highly restrictive meal time routines (e.g. toddler only eats from a blue bowl while playing with a favorite electronic toy in front of the TV playing a favorite cartoon)
- Frequent coughing, gagging and/or vomiting are observed during meals
Typically avoids and/or demonstrates heightened anxiety during meal periods
- Other medical symptoms such as acid reflux, food allergies, constipation, pre-mature birth, history of tube feeding, weight loss or difficulty maintaining a growth curve, enlarged tonsils, and developmental delays

**Strategies for supporting healthy eating habits**
- Allow extra time and short breaks
- Reduce distractions around meal times
- Provide a relaxed and calm environment around meal times
- Provide opportunities to explore and interact with new foods (e.g. cooking, touching, smelling)
- Set aside time to eat together in order to increase opportunities for children to participate in the social aspects of meals

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**Resources:**
http://www.mayoclinic.org/childrens-health/art-20044948
http://www.babycenter.com/0_how-to-handle-a-picky-eater_9199.bc
http://www.scholastic.com/parents/resources/article/parent-child/no-more-food-fights