

Winning Over Your 'Picky Eater'

Some sage advice on introducing children to new and nutritious foods



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Even if you think your “picky” eater will turn away from healthier foods that are foreign to him or her, give it your best shot. It’s worth the effort!

The truth is that children’s eating habits are much easier to change than those of adults. And because of their natural curiosity, kids are more likely – than not – to try and enjoy new, nutritious foods. Laying the foundation for a lifetime of healthy eating begins in childhood, when you can gradually introduce new and exciting foods into your children’s diet at their own pace, one week or month at a time.

Here are 10 nutritious tips to help you foster healthy eating habits in your children:

1. Choose a rainbow of colorful foods at meals. Health experts recommend that we consume a minimum of five servings of fruits and vegetables each day. Choosing a rainbow of colorful fruits and vegetables such as fiery red bell peppers, deep yellow mango, dark green spinach and bright blueberries will ensure that your child reaps the benefits of a variety of antioxidants, fiber, vitamins and minerals.

Nutrition Tip: Involve your children in the meal-planning process, and challenge them to help come up with meal ideas that include at least three different colors!

2. Go for the grain. Wholegrains, such as oatmeal, bran flakes, whole-wheat bread and brown rice contain dietary fiber. A high-fiber diet offers protection against a number of conditions such as constipation, high blood cholesterol and weight gain. What’s more, high-fiber, whole-grain foods contain antioxidant nutrients, vitamins and minerals.

Nutrition Tip: Make the whole-grain switch through substitution. Here are a few ideas:

- Serve your child a bowl of whole-grain cereal in place of one made with refined sugar and flour.
- Stack whole-wheat crackers with apples and low-fat cheese for a tasty, mid-afternoon snack.
- Substitute whole-wheat for white bread on sandwiches.



3. Boost protein and fiber with legumes. Dried beans, lentils and split peas are great sources of fiber, protein, vitamins and minerals. Help your child enjoy the benefits of protein from meatless food sources a few times each week and introduce their palates to a variety of flavorful options.

Nutrition Tip: There are many ways you can add legumes to your child's diet:

- Serve hummus (pureed chick peas) with fresh crisp vegetable sticks as a snack.
- Toss beans into your family's favorite marinara sauce.
- Fill taco shells with low-fat canned refried beans.

4. Limit saturated and trans fats: the unhealthy fats. Many snacks and meals, which cater to kids, are loaded with fats associated with poor health and disease. Saturated fats, found in fatty cuts of meat, full-fat dairy products and palm oil, raise cholesterol and are associated with some cancers and heart disease. Trans fats, derived from partially hydrogenated oils, are associated with obesity, diabetes and heart disease. Instead of giving your children snacks laden with these unhealthy fats, choose fat-free items, or those made with liquid oils such as canola, safflower, sunflower or peanut.

Nutrition Tip: Always check the Nutrition Facts panel on the food label. Avoid foods that contain trans fats, and choose items with no more than two grams of saturated fat per serving.

5. Introduce your child's palate to healthy fats. Healthy fats include mono- and polyunsaturated fats derived from olive, canola, peanut, soy, sesame, flaxseed and walnut oils. Adding olives, avocados, nuts, seeds, nut butters (e.g., peanut and almond butters) and ground flaxseed to the mix offers you even more options for infusing your children's diet with healthy fats.

Nutrition Tip: Adding small portions of healthy fats to your child's meals and snacks will ensure they receive all of the essential fats needed for good health. Consider these ideas:

- Whip up some tasty guacamole and use as a replacement for mayonnaise in your children's sandwich. Or thinly slice some avocado into their sandwich or salad.
- Let your kids munch on pitted green and black olives for a treat.
- Use olive or canola oil when sautéing, baking and preparing homemade salad dressings or marinades.

6. Bump up their calcium. Children need calcium and vitamin D to maintain and build strong bones.

Nutrition Tip: Boost your child's calcium intake by offering skim or 1% milk, reduced-fat cheese and low-fat yogurt. You can also increase calcium by using non-dairy foods such as calcium-fortified orange juice, soy milk, and fortified cereals, breads, and breakfast bars. Calcium can also be found in almonds, dark leafy green vegetables and canned sardines and salmon with bones. Vitamin D, which helps the body absorb calcium and is absorbed by the body through adequate exposure to the sun, can be found in fortified foods such as dairy and cereal, eggs and some fish.

7. Choose lean protein foods. Protein is essential for your child's proper growth and development.

Nutrition Tip: Choosing lean protein means you will arm your child with more of the healthy fats he or she needs for good health. Try to select:

- Lean meats such as sirloin, tenderloin or lean ground beef or pork
- Skinless, boneless chicken and turkey breasts or tenders
- Salmon, tuna, tilapia, mackerel, scallops or shrimp
- Dried beans, peas, lentils and bean spreads
- Soybeans or other soy-derived foods like tofu, tempeh, textured vegetable protein or soy "burgers"
- Low-fat dairy foods such as sliced or chunk cheese, cottage cheese, milk, and yogurt or fortified soy substitutes such as soy yogurt or soy milk

8. Remember to keep your children well hydrated. We often take fluid intake for granted. Water, decaffeinated beverages, milk, soy milk and 100% fruit or vegetable juice will help your children stay well hydrated. But keep in mind that water is the preferred source of fluid, because most drinks and juices contain added sugars.

Nutrition Tip: Make sure your children remain well hydrated throughout the day by supplying them with adequate fluids for their school day.

9. Pack well to snack well. Snacking is a big part of your children's diet – especially for those on the go. Despite being constantly on the move, your child can still eat healthfully. All it takes is a little planning and preparation.

Nutrition Tip: Here are some quick and tasty snack ideas for your on-the-go children:

- Fresh fruit with low-fat yogurt dip
- Fresh cut veggies with salsa, bean dip or low-fat sour cream dip
- Dried fruit and nut mixes or trail mix
- Whole-grain crackers topped with low-fat cheese
- Tuna salad on appetizer-sized pumpernickel bread slices
- Low-fat yogurt or yogurt smoothies
- Fig cookies
- Whole-grain pretzel twists

* ***Remember to keep perishable foods in a cooler or refrigerator.***

10. Don't forget breakfast. Research indicates that children who eat breakfast tend to be leaner, perform better on tests and miss fewer days from school than those who don't eat breakfast. A breakfast that includes healthy, unrefined carbohydrate sources and lean protein will ensure that your children start their day on a healthful foot.

Nutrition Tips: Try these quick, healthy and tasty breakfast ideas:

- A bowl of warm oatmeal topped with cinnamon, honey, chopped walnuts, and diced apple; served with a cup of chocolate soy milk
- Whole-wheat frozen waffles topped with sliced strawberries, pure maple syrup; served with two ounces of lean turkey sausage and 100% orange juice
- A Whole-wheat English muffin spread with 1 Tablespoon peanut butter; served with an eight-ounce container of low-fat yogurt and an orange

A Little Patience Goes a Long Way

Be patient with kids when introducing them to new foods. And don't give up. Remember that as you expose your children to new foods, it may take several tries before they accept them.

Here's to Your Good Health

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