

9 WAYS TO TAKE THE ANXIETY OUT OF KIDS' NUTRITION

Picky eaters + hectic schedules can make meal planning feel like advanced algebra. Here, low-stress strategies to help kids get the nutrients they need, plus 5 recipes they're likely to love.

1 KNOW WHAT'S YOUR JOB, AND WHAT'S THE KID'S JOB.

Making it clear who gets to decide what takes some confusion out of food planning and mealtime. It also gives kids a much needed sense of autonomy.

PARENTS / GUARDIANS...

- Shop for food
- Prepare the food
- Provide regular meals at set times
- Make eating times enjoyable



KIDS...

- Decide whether to eat
- Decide which of the available foods to eat
- Decide how much to eat

Adapted from <https://www.elynsatterinstitute.org/how-to-feed-the-division-of-responsibility-in-feeding/>

2 BE A ROLE MODEL.

Just like kids copy your words, they'll mimic your behavior. They may even pay more attention to what you show than what you say. So, explore your own attitudes and decisions around food.

WHEN YOU CAN, TRY TO...



EAT SLOWLY

EAT MEALS AT THE TABLE, UNDISTRACTED

BE OPEN AND CURIOUS ABOUT NEW FOODS

FOCUS ON FOODS THAT ARE NUTRITIOUS AND MAKE YOU FEEL GOOD

STOP EATING WHEN SATISFIED OR FULL, NOT STUFFED

3 EXPLORE FOOD FEELINGS.

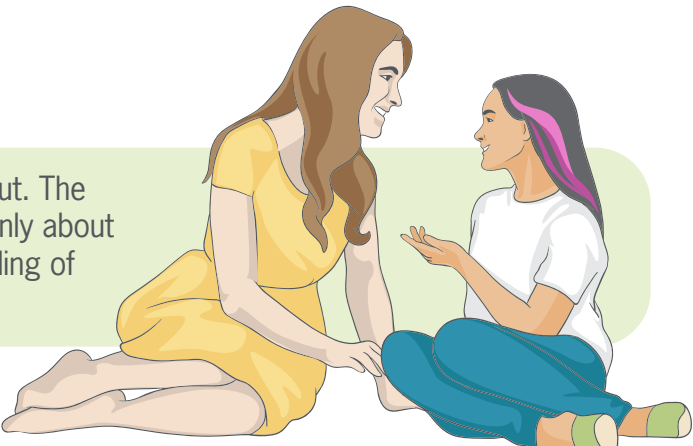
Make sure kids feel safe to communicate worries and anxiety around food. Helping them work through this fill-in-the-blank sentence can get to root causes:

When I eat at [place] I feel [emotion] because [trigger].

COMMON REASONS FOR UNCOMFORTABLE FOOD FEELINGS:

- Being teased at school for "unhealthy" (or "too healthy") lunches
- Family members pressuring kids to eat a certain way
- Feeling "weird" or left out for eating culturally different foods
- Diet culture
- Beauty ideals
- Body image

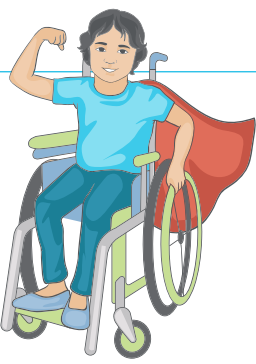
You don't have to "fix" whatever you find out. The exercise is just to communicate more openly about food, so you can have a better understanding of what your child is going through.



4 CONNECT FOOD TO SUPERPOWERS.

Kids are more likely to make good choices if they know why it matters (in a way that's relevant to them).

Educate kids about how the right foods will turn them into a superkid.



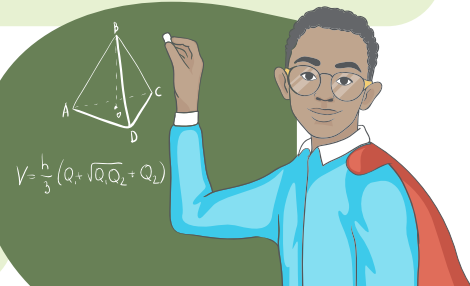
"Protein-rich foods like fish, eggs, and beans help your muscles get stronger!"

"Healthy carbohydrates like squash, brown rice, and sweet potatoes give you energy to play hard!"



"Colorful vegetables like spinach, beets, and red peppers help keep your eyes healthy and help protect you from getting sick!"

"Healthy fats like avocado, seeds, and olive oil help your brain develop and get smart!"

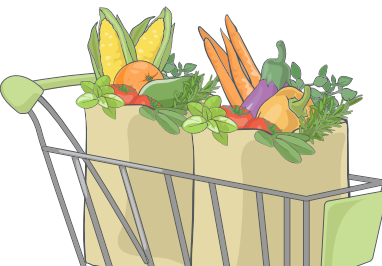


"Eating whole, healthy foods and getting a range of nutrients helps you feel good and balances your mood!"

5 ASK FOR INPUT.

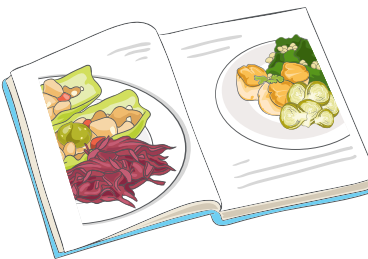
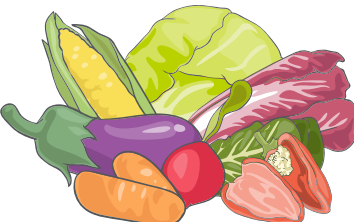
Sometimes picky eating is less about food than control. Asking for kids' ideas ensures you'll buy food they like, plus gives them a chance to feel "in charge."

TRY ASKING...



I'm going to the grocery store. What would you like to add to the list this week?

Hey, let's take a look at different types of vegetables. Which ones do you think you'd be willing to try?



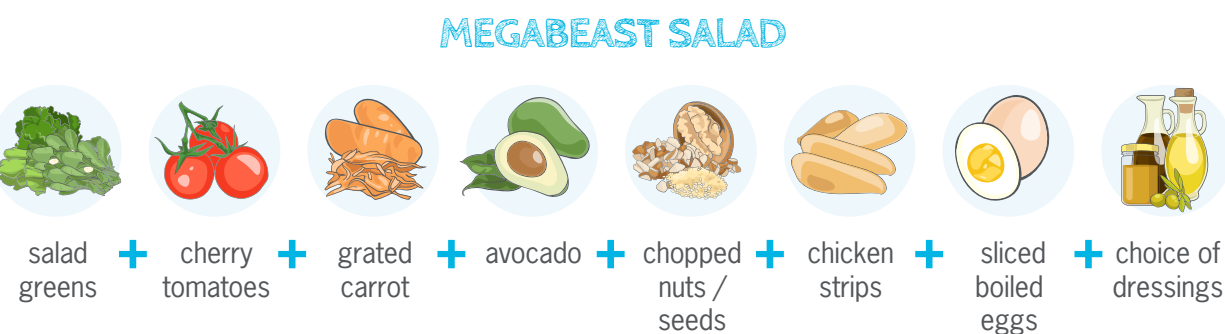
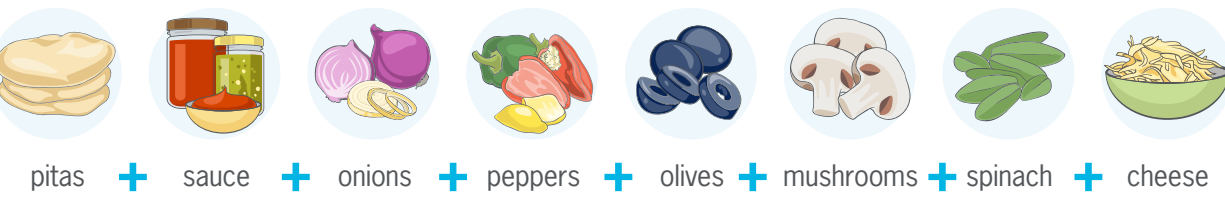
We've been in a rut with dinners. Could you flip through this cookbook with me and pick out some meals to try?

For more on how to communicate with kids about food choices, check out <https://www.precisionnutrition.com/how-to-get-kids-to-eat-vegetables>

6 OFFER CUSTOMIZABLE MEALS.

Appetites and preferences differ, so plates can too. Present a variety of healthy options to let kids (confidently) build their own meals.

BUILD-YOUR-OWN PIZZA



For more healthy meal ideas, check out <https://www.precisionnutrition.com/create-the-perfect-meal-infographic>

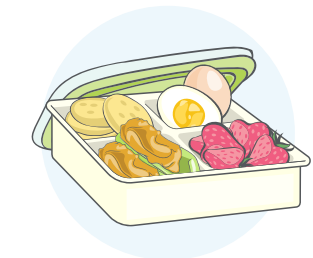
7 MASTER THE "GRAB & GO" SCHOOL-DAY LUNCH.

School lunches are a common source of stress. Don't try to be perfect! Stock stuff that's easy to prepare and that your kid will eat. Keep food on low shelves so kids can help pack their meals.

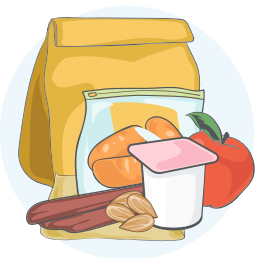
QUICK AND EASY LUNCH STAPLES

Yogurt cups	Hummus or bean spread
Cheese slices	Nut/seed butters
Veggie sticks	Cottage cheese
Hard boiled eggs	Minimally-processed lean deli meat or jerky
Raw nuts/seeds	Variety of small containers or bento boxes for packing
Fruit	
Whole- or sprouted-grain breads/wraps/crackers	

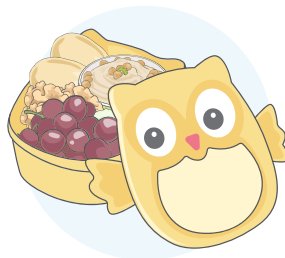
EASY, DELICIOUS LUNCH IDEAS



Boiled eggs, crackers, berries, celery w/ nut butter



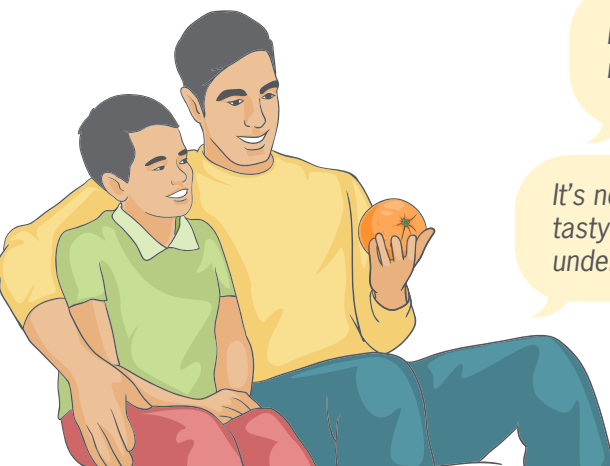
Yogurt cup, apple, almonds, jerky stick, baby carrots



Pita and hummus, cucumber slices, grapes, walnuts

8 AVOID MORALIZING FOOD CHOICES.

Talking about food in terms of "good" or "bad" can lead to shame (when eating treats) or approval seeking (with nutritious choices). This overcomplicates our relationship with food.



It's normal to eat for pleasure, just as it's normal to eat for a strong, healthy body.

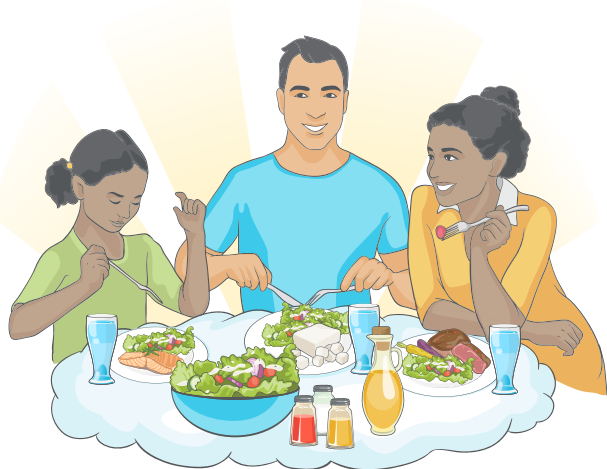
It's normal to occasionally overeat a really tasty food, just as it's normal to occasionally undereat when you just don't have an appetite.

It's OK to not eat certain foods if they make you feel sick or out of control. You can even ask to have them kept out of the house.

9 TAKE THE PRESSURE OFF.

It's understandable to want "perfect": Colorful plates, everyone getting along, always eating at a routine time. But generally, that's not realistic. Roll with change and trust that things balance out over time.

"PERFECT"



REAL LIFE



- Kids always eat the "right" amount.
- Kids always eat their greens.
- Kids like everything you like.
- The family always eats together.
- Every meal is balanced.

- Kids may go through stages where they eat more or less than usual. Unless low or high appetite is consistent, assume the phase will pass.
- Encourage an open mind, but recognize that some kids are "supertasters"—exceptionally sensitive to flavors. Focus on veggies they do like, or find ways to prepare greens in palate-soothing ways. *
- Kids may have different opinions (and those opinions may change, then change again). Play with prep methods, like grated vs. sliced carrots or sauteed vs. roasted broccoli.
- Appetites vary. For example, young kids often prefer "dinner" right after school and a snack at dinnertime. If family meals are a challenge, aim for once a week rather than daily.
- Life gets busy. Tantrums happen. Sometimes a "meal" is a bowl of chips or a carton of blueberries. It's OK to let your kid "win". Aim for a range of nutrients across the week instead of putting pressure on every meal.

*To learn more about how to prepare vegetables that even vegetable-haters will like, check out <https://www.precisionnutrition.com/dont-like-vegetables-infographic>

5 FUN MEALS IDEAS KIDS WILL LOVE.

These recipes are fun and draw on tried-and-true kid favorites. You can even invite older kids to help prepare them. (And toddlers love to push that blender button!)



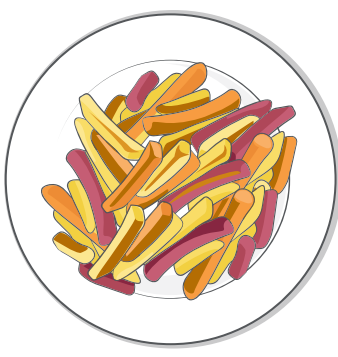
MONSTER SMOOTHIE

- 1 frozen banana
 - ½ cup Greek yogurt
 - 1 handful spinach, kale, or other green of kids' choice
 - 1 Tbsp almond or peanut butter
 - A few ice cubes
 - Water to thin
- Add all ingredients to a blender and blend until smooth and brilliant green. (If your kid wrinkles their nose at the color, tell them it's what strong monsters drink!)



MR. POTATO FACE

- 1 portion of mashed potatoes
 - 2 handfuls salad greens
 - ½ - 1 cooked sausage
 - 1 large avocado slice
 - 2 cherry tomatoes
- Spread mashed potatoes in a circle on a plate. This is the "face." Arrange salad greens as "hair." Place sausage as the "nose." Use a slice or two of avocado as a "smile," and two cherry tomatoes as "eyes." Dress salad greens if desired.



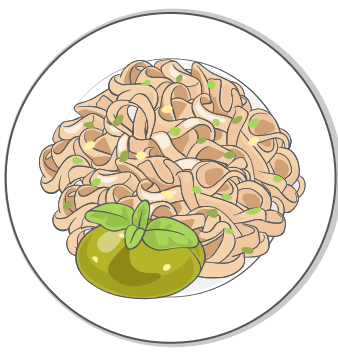
RAINBOW ROOT FRIES

- Beets
 - Parsnips
 - Sweet potatoes
 - Olive oil
- Preheat oven to 400 F. Cut washed and peeled root vegetables into ¼" matchsticks and place in large bowl. Drizzle with olive oil and toss. Spread sticks ¼" inch apart on parchment-lined baking tray. Bake for 15-20 minutes, then flip them and bake 10-15 minutes until crispy at the edges. Salt to taste.



ZUCCHINI PIZZA BOATS

- 1 zucchini per person, halved lengthwise, stems cut off, seeds scooped out
 - Pizza sauce
 - Cheese, grated
 - Choice of veggies: sliced onions, cherry tomatoes, olives, mushrooms, etc
 - Cooked ground meat or tempeh (optional)
- Preheat oven to 400 F. Place zucchini halves on parchment-lined baking tray. Top each with a spoonful of pizza sauce. Add a thin layer of grated cheese, then veggies. Sprinkle with salt, pepper, and a light drizzle of olive oil. Bake for 25-35 minutes, until zucchini is tender and toppings are cooked. Finish with about 3 minutes on broil.



KALE PESTO PASTA

- 2 cups kale leaves, stems removed
 - ½ cup extra virgin olive oil
 - ½ cup toasted almonds, walnuts, or pinenuts
 - ¼ cup Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese
 - Juice of 1 lemon
 - 2 cloves garlic
 - Whole grain or bean pasta, cooked
- Place all ingredients except pasta in a blender or food processor and blend until fairly smooth. Spoon the mixture onto the pasta and season with salt. Toss to combine, and serve. Delicious with extra roasted veggies.