

A Free Guide for Exhausted, Devoted, Won't-Give-Up Parents

The Sneaky Nutrition Guide

How to get real nutrition into your neurodivergent child's diet without the constant battle, another new food on their plate, or one more "just try one bite."



By Randi Goodman

Neurodivergent Family Coach at You Got This – And a parent who's been right where you are.

Before we get into it — a word from me to you.

I'm not a doctor. I'm not a dietitian. I'm not going to give you a food pyramid or a meal plan with sixteen ingredients your child will never touch.

What I am is someone who has studied neurodivergent eating, worked with families navigating it every day, and — most importantly — lived it. I know what it feels like to have a child with a list of safe foods that could fit on a Post-it note. I know the brand of exhausted you are when you just want so badly to nourish your kid and you feel like the tools available to every other parent just... don't apply to you.

This guide is everything I wish someone had handed me earlier. It's practical, it's honest, and it's written for real life — not an ideal version of it.

Take what works. Leave what doesn't. Take the interruptions as they come, and the breaks as you need them. Come back when you're ready.

And if at any point you want to talk through *your* situation — your child, your family, your particular four safe foods, I'm here for that too. That's exactly what I do.

I get you. I've got you. You got this.

— *Randi*

Ingredient One: Know the Rules Before You Break Them



Every safe food has a reason it's safe. It's not random, even when it feels random. The color, the texture, the temperature, the way it sounds when it's chewed — your child's nervous system has cataloged all of it, and any deviation from the expected profile is a red flag. I'll explain prediction sensitivity in a separate piece. For now, let's focus on what needs to happen to keep your child healthy. This response to food is not a choice they're making. It's their sensory system doing exactly what it's built to do. The issue isn't their behavior, it's that their sensitivity is dialed up past what most of us can imagine.

So before you start sneaking anything into what they will eat, you need to understand what makes a safe food safe for your child specifically. Because the rules aren't universal but you will be able to spot the patterns, and when you do, you'll be able to see exactly where the hiding spots are that won't compromise what your child is already willing to eat.

Texture is non-negotiable.

You cannot hide something chunky in a smooth sauce. You cannot slip whole seeds into something soft without them being found, identified, and treated as a contaminant. Our kids are SMART and they are very aware of the things that work against them. If the food is supposed to be smooth, it has to stay smooth. You know how a safe food falls off the list the very first time it's "wrong" to your child.

The good news is that smooth things can hide an enormous amount. Blended, pureed, juiced, these are texture-neutral ways to sneak things in and they are your best friends. If something has to be grated or ground before it goes in, do it. Worrying about it is almost always more exhausting than doing the extra step.

And on the flip side, if your child loves crunch, that's an opportunity right there! It's pretty easy to sneak chopped nuts and seeds into crackers, bars, even the bread crumbs you're using to coat yet another batch of chicken nuggets. Nutritional yeast sprinkled on top doesn't change the texture of what's underneath. Work with the texture that's already accepted, not against it.

Color tells a whole story.

Your child decides whether a food is safe before it ever reaches their mouth. Visual clues tell us so much, and color is one of the first identifiers we use. Use that. Natural foods can mimic the colors your child already accepts. Turmeric makes things yellow. Spinach juice turns things green. Beet juice makes things pink. If your child has a favorite color, you have a vehicle. It's quite simple once you notice it. Use colors as a feature and frame it right (more on that in a minute). The goal is to make something look appealing, which may mean something different to you than your child. Roll with it. Green Hulk pancakes can be a magical breakfast instead of an appalling spinach imposter.



Flavor has a logic to it.

Salt helps balance out bitterness. Fats smooth out sharpness. Sweet and warm spices amplify each other. There's a reason cinnamon and sugar are a classic pairing, they genuinely make each other better. If you're adding something with a strong or bitter note like bone broth and certain greens, you just need to balance it out to keep it low profile. A little salted butter into bone broth. Nutritional yeast blended with parmesan so the familiar flavor carries the unfamiliar one.

You're not masking. You're balancing. There's a difference, and it matters — because masking tends to backfire when the ratio shifts. Balancing means the flavor profile stays stable even as the ingredients change slowly over time. This is a marathon for sure, not a sprint. Because if you rush it, they will sprint away from the table.

Now you know why the wrong shade of yellow can derail dinner, and why a single unexpected seed in a smooth sauce is a catastrophe you end up cleaning off the floor. You've got the map, so now let's talk about where to hide things.

Ingredient Two: The Hiding Spots

Now that you have picked up on the patterns and rules, you're aware of what works and why, here's where the actual magic happens. There are places in your child's existing accepted foods where you have wiggle room, where you won't be disturbing the surface of anything. Magical little caves you can hide treasures in.



Soups and sauces are your best Trojan horse.

If your child accepts any kind of soup or sauce, you have an extraordinary amount of room to work with.

Vegetables can be juiced or pureed to be entirely smooth.

They fold in easily enough. Bone broth adds protein and collagen and minerals. Just remember to balance the slight bitterness with a little butter and salt so that it doesn't blow your cover. A good tomato soup can be doing

significantly more nutritional work than it looks, smells, and tastes like. Blend in an egg, temper it so it remains

stealthy. Add a scoop of fiber powder like psyllium husk, a

spoon of protein powder that's unflavored or a flavor that fits the profile of what it's going into. None of it should be visible. None of it should change the color or texture.

Just make sure you're being careful about quantities. Sprinkles are not just for birthdays.

Here's one of my favorite tricks because it feels like a treat AND gives them some of the autonomy they crave. Autonomy matters more than most people realize. Take a little shaker jar and put some non-pareils inside. Or just use the bottle they came with. Add chia seeds, hemp hearts, flaxseed, whatever tiny seeds are packed with the nutrients you're worried they're missing out on. Mix them together so they look like part of the sprinkle blend. Make a big enough deal without going over the top. When you serve waffles, pancakes, cupcakes, or fairy bread, let them sprinkle their own treat on top. Don't worry about "too much" sugar in the sprinkles. It's worth it for those omegas, calcium, and protein!

They're choosing to put it on. They're in charge of how much. The autonomy does an enormous amount of the work and doubles as a building block for future food choices. A child who opted in is a completely different situation to a child who's being managed. That pressure taken off actually makes them more likely to start opening up to new foods. There's trust and respect there that they need in order to feel safe.

Nutritional yeast is a chameleon.

If your child likes parmesan cheese on anything, think pasta, pizza, and soup, you can start blending nutritional yeast into the parmesan. It has a similar savory, somewhat cheesy flavor and it adds in some B vitamins and protein to whatever it lands on. Start with a small ratio and build it up over time. It also disappears into almost any savory sauce if you're not doing the parmesan route.

Pizza is a sneaky superhero and I will die on this hill.

Get your juicer out. Use spinach juice in place of water in the dough. The dough turns green. Call it Hulk Pizza, or Alien Pizza. Call it whatever is going to land with your child. Cartoon character Calvin (and his sidekick Hobbes) would have loved the idea of booger pizza while my own would prefer a nod to something like an inchworm or grasshopper. The point is that the color can be a selling point rather than a barrier if you approach it right. Beet juice makes it pink. Carrot juice makes it a golden marigold color.



The sauce can smuggle in pureed vegetables as long as you're balancing the flavors carefully and keeping the texture as it should be. Swap regular mozzarella for a cashew-based alternative made with tapioca flour, lemon juice, salt and nutritional yeast — it's still stretchy, it still melts, it still reads as pizza cheese. Which means it's still safe. Again, don't do it all at once. Make one tiny change at a time.

Condiment lovers are easier than you think.

If your child is a dipper, you already have a vehicle that too many people overlook. A hearty, vegetable-packed tomato soup can be offered up with a wide variety of what they like to dip. Crackers, cheese sticks, goldfish, carrots,... Give them a tray full of things to dip. They're more likely to find a pairing that works and more likely to get some of the soup in their little body. Or, go the other route. Offer alllllll the condiments so they can see if the chicken tastes better in this or that, or that, or that. All those attempts are another bite of the chicken making its way toward the goal. You can replace ketchup as a dipping sauce without the transition feeling dramatic because when they find something they like, on their terms, you save everyone the associated trauma. A snack tray with several dipping options gives them autonomy and variety without a single “just try one bite” conversation. Let the dip do the work.



The ones that hide almost anywhere:

Some additions are so neutral they can go into almost anything without disturbing the peace. Psyllium husk has no flavor, no smell, and adds fiber. Ground flaxseed doesn't even really have a flavor to speak of, though you can see it, so use it where texture is less scrutinized and visibility is obscured. Nutritional yeast blends into any savory dish. Bone broth replaces water or stock in almost anything. Juice can replace water in oatmeal if it's the right pairing of flavors. A blended egg disappears into a smooth sauce entirely if you temper it.

Remember, none of this happens overnight. You're going to have wins that feel tiny and setbacks that feel enormous and you're going to have days where the only victory is that everyone ate something. And that's okay. This was never about perfection. It's about slow growth, development, and direction. And direction, however slow, is everything. Practice makes progress and there is no such thing as perfection. Which brings us to the part nobody talks about enough: what progress actually looks like when you're living inside it.

Ingredient Three: Baby Steps Are Still Steps

Progress with your child won't look like progress most of the time. It doesn't look like a child swapping out saltines for spinach. It looks like a child tolerating a slightly different version of the same food. Chicken nuggets in a different font, if you will. It looks like a fast food burger in the box, to that same burger on a plate, to one made at home, gradually accepted on its own plate. It looks so slow that sometimes you don't see it at all, and then one day someone makes a comment and you realize how far you've come.

That's not failure. That's how this works. Trust the process.



The container trick.

Your child's favorite fast food comes in a specific container with the right label. You've seen the problems when the brand changes their packaging, so you know how slowly you have to ease this transition. But you can do it. Knowing that container is part of what makes it safe is going to work for you, not against you. It will help you tackle the change while maintaining the ritual of it. Make frozen chicken nuggets that are as similar as possible (think of shape and texture as well as color) and put them in the original container. Maybe even mix them in together with the fast food ones. Serve them that way for a while. How long? Until they aren't wary of it at all anymore. Then move to the nuggets next to the empty container on the plate. Your child has access to the empty

container. They can put them back in if that makes the transition feel safer, but the presentation of them on the plate is an important step. Eventually you will be able to serve the nuggets without the container. After a while you'll realize they're eating the generic nuggets on a generic plate and you've successfully swapped the branded food for a more pliable option. Because that's when you can start playing with homemade ones. Nutritional yeast in the chicken, egg mixed into it, these things are invisible under the golden coating. You can start mixing seeds into the bread crumbs. Over time, those greasy fast food beige nuggets have evolved to be nutritionally packed, baked goodness. Then, somewhere down the line, you can have your child help make the nuggets, try out "naked" nuggets. Eventually grilled chicken. Suddenly, you look back and realize you can order off a menu at a restaurant for your kid without all the fanfare there once was. It sounds like it will take forever but each step is its own little victory and you should celebrate each one.

The ratio swap.

Cold turkey substitutions almost never work and honestly, why would they? If something tastes different it's not the same food. It's no longer safe. And that's a legitimate problem for your child, not a preference to be overridden. Don't lose a safe food by rushing the process. Instead use ratios.

Four parts sour cream to one part plain Greek yoghurt. Same texture, close enough in flavor that it passes. Over weeks or months, shift the ratio to three to one and so on. The flavor profile just needs to move gradually so that the transition happens below the threshold of detection. Each child has their own radar. Trust your gut. Eventually you're serving mostly Greek yogurt to a child who would have refused it outright at the start.

This works with meat too. If your child eats one type of ground meat that's where you can start blending in a small amount of another. Meatballs, nuggets, or a hearty bolognese sauce are all places where the texture is already processed enough that a



combination reads as the same thing. Shift the ratio slowly. The goal can be a permanent blend if that's what works, or a full swap over time. Either outcome is a win. You want balanced nutrition. Ground beef offers more zinc and iron, while turkey has less fats and is more heart healthy. This is why we want our kids to have a wider selection of safe foods. Everything has its own benefits, so one type being leaner or one being higher in iron doesn't necessarily translate to either having the nutritional advantage over the other.

A word on autonomy. It isn't just a tactic.



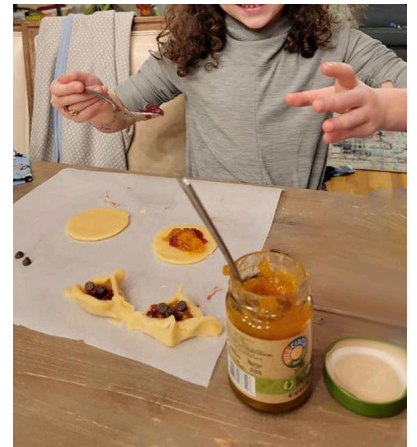
Letting your child help choose ingredients at the store, help measure things into a bowl, help stir, and put together their own plate isn't just a trick to get buy-in. Don't get me wrong, it does work that way too. But what's important is that it actually changes their relationship with food and that follows your child for life. Someone who touched the ingredients, who watched the food be prepared, who watched it rise in the oven, who had a role in it, is engaging with food. Food plopped down in front of them already on a plate doesn't compare. It can't. The child isn't invested and may not even be hungry. Helping to cook actually stimulates their hunger. Now, this isn't a fix-all and it won't work every time. But it will shift their outlook and their relationship with eating. It will open up doors and conversations. It will create exposures without pressure. My meat averse daughter made meatballs for my son and ended up trying one. She didn't like it. She still doesn't. But she was incredibly proud of herself and it was all on her terms. The tactile exposure worked better than sitting a meatball on her plate to remain untouched for countless meals. So, yes, some days they'll help make it and still refuse to eat it and that's okay. Because some days they will make it for someone else and decide to eat it. The relationship is still shifting. Slowly, quietly, in the right direction.

You've got the framework now. You know the rules, you know the hiding spots, you know that slow is not the same as stuck. So consider this next part your reward. You deserve a little something extra for making it this far. On top of everything we've covered, there's a quiet kind of magic sitting in your kitchen right now that most people walk right past every single day.

Ingredient Four: The Spice Cabinet Is a Secret Weapon

Consider this your bonus round. You've done the hard work and now you get to have the fun bit.

I'm not going to tell you to offer more variety or make food enticing by making faces and animals on their plates. That's the stuff you've heard and tried and thrown away uneaten. It didn't work. Exposure is important, yes, so keep that up. But all of this is slow progress, so in the meantime, reach for your new favorite secret weapon.



Your spice rack. That's it. That's the magic.

You don't need to go out and buy another new supplement or some expensive superfood. I'm not selling you on some pyramid scheme for some health food company. I'm just trying to get my kids to eat food that helps them grow. So yeah, walk into your kitchen and check out your spices because you got this! It's in those jars and packets that are gathering dust next to your stove. You reach past them for the salt because that's all your kid asks for, but they're about to earn their keep. Because used wisely, with everything you now know about texture, color, balance, and going slowly, those spices are about to become something extraordinary. Spices have significantly higher concentrations of antioxidants than the fruit and vegetables your kid isn't even eating. Cumin is really high in iron. Cinnamon and cloves are full of manganese and calcium! Paprika is loaded with vitamin A. So you can add nutrition to foods your child already accepts, and quietly expand what familiar tastes like, and they do it all without a single negotiation, without a new food on the plate, without a battle. Spices won't replace fruits

and vegetables, so don't give up on those. These just offer a little more here and there wherever we can squeak it in.

This isn't about flavor. It's about nutrition. Here's what I keep handy, and why each one gets to live in my kitchen:

Cinnamon — start here, seriously



If there is one spice to begin with, it's this one. Most kids have already met cinnamon somewhere.

Graham crackers, oatmeal, so many desserts that smelled warm and safe and inviting. That familiarity is everything when you're working with a child whose reaction to anything new on their plate is palpable, immediate, and non-negotiable.

Beyond the comfort factor, cinnamon helps regulate blood sugar. That's a big deal for kids whose diets are heavy in simple carbs. So start adding a bit into any accepted oatmeal, pancake batter, onto toast with peanut butter, mix it in with honey. It won't really change the look of the food. It barely changes the taste when you add just a pinch. And then one day it's just part of what that food tastes like. That is a real, albeit small win. And we celebrate the small wins here for sure!

Turmeric — the invisible one

A tiny pinch of turmeric slides right into all of the warm, savory, yellow foods. Scrambled eggs? Check. Mac and cheese? Oh yeah! Make rice yellow? Let's see if it is accepted (while still offering regular, trusted, white rice) and try not to visibly react when it goes unnoticed. That's the point. You got it in! That's the whole trick. If your child already accepts yellow food you're already most of the way there.

Boosted immunity, cardiovascular health, brain health- these are some of Turmeric's superpowers. Turmeric has strong anti-inflammatory properties that are especially relevant for our kids with gut sensitivities. In small amounts you genuinely cannot taste

it. It doesn't change texture. It just quietly does its job. Start with the tiniest amount you can measure and build up so gradually that the shift never registers.

Garlic — probably already in your kitchen, now use it intentionally

You probably cook with garlic without thinking of it as a health tool but it is! Garlic supports the immune system and helps with cholesterol which isn't something we generally think about for kids but remember, this is building up their lifelong relationship with food. It's been used medicinally going back as far in history as you can imagine. For kids whose limited diets make them more susceptible to getting run down and catching whatever bug is going around this week, having garlic work quietly in the background is not something to make light of.



Roasted, garlic becomes almost sweet and loses any sharpness entirely. Blended into a sauce it disappears. If your child accepts any kind of sauce at all, garlic can live there. Make a habit out of grabbing some garlic for all the health it brings to the table.

Ginger — for the tummy troubles that come with the territory

A lot of kids with restricted diets also deal with digestive discomfort. Whether it's because of the diet or the diet is because of the dysfunctional digestive system doesn't matter as much as making both easier. They're connected, it's common, and it's one more thing you're probably managing quietly on top of everything else. It's not just something old ladies sip on for fun. They sing its praises because ginger genuinely helps. Anti-inflammatory properties in ginger can ease some of that tummy upset, and take the edge off of the nausea and discomfort that comes with a diet that isn't as varied as it ought to be.

Finely grated ginger sprinkled into a sauce or a smoothie can dissolve completely. In a biscuit or pancake it becomes something warm and familiar. If your child gets nauseous in the car, a weak ginger tea or even a ginger biscuit en route is doing something real.

Cumin — the one that hides in plain sight

For kids who accept savory foods like potatoes, beans, rice, cumin is worth a slow introduction. It's just a little bit nutty and warm. It blends into things rather than boldly announcing itself with a flavor punch. It's also good for blood sugar regulation, just like cinnamon. This is so important for our carb-loaded kiddos.

Start with the powder form mixed into mashed potato or stir it into rice. To keep it stealthy, just use a tiny amount and increase in tiny increments. It's not about your child tolerating the taste of cumin. It's about their body getting something from it without a single negotiation required from you. Cumin promotes healthy digestion, and offers iron that isn't found in a packet of saltines. A little bit goes a long way.



Paprika — mild only, not the spicy one

Sweet paprika differs from smoked paprika a lot. It's not hot either. It's rich in vitamin C and has a gentle flavor that can coat chicken, potato wedges or roasted veg without making the food look or taste dramatically different. If you're heavy handed you'll land yourself in the orange food corner, so consider what that means for you and your child as you work with this one. It should work with you, not against you. If your child does accept the golden orangey color it brings, and roasted foods pass the test, paprika can be sprinkled on potatoes, chicken, any of it really. And chances are, they will accept this color over some of the other ones because that golden color tends to be read as safe, inviting, appealing. The brain isn't as triggered by golden hues as it is by greens.



Cardamom – hear me out on this one

I know, it sounds fancy, and I know that's not what you're here for, but hear me out. Cardamom has a sweet, almost vanilla-adjacent flavor and a warmth to it that works beautifully in anything milky or creamy. A pinch in a smoothie, in custard or homemade ice cream, in rice pudding, in cakes and pies and cookies. Especially for the children who live on the white side of beige foods and rely heavily on dairy-based foods, it's an easy addition that supports digestion and slips in a new flavor so gently it barely registers as new at all. And what it brings to the party as an added bonus, the fact that it fights bacteria and reduces inflammation.

None of these are a miracle fix and they can't replace the broader work of gradually expanding what foods your child will eat. But they are real nutrition, doing real work *with* the foods your child is already eating. On the days when the only accepted meal is plain pasta for the 3rd time in a row, knowing there's a pinch of turmeric and garlic in that sauce is something you can hold on to instead of the guilt and worry you've carried around for far too long already. You're not failing your child. You're adapting instead of giving up. That's good parenting.

If you want to talk through your specific menu issues, I'm here. Discovery calls are always free to see if we're a good fit.

