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.ellyndivisionmtbsale.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.

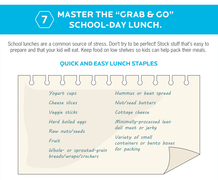
Kids are more likely to make good choices if they know why it matters (in a way that's relevant to them).

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

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...



For more on how to communicate with kids about food choices, check out https://www.precisionnutrition.com/how-to-talk-to-kids-about-food-infographic

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

TACO NIGHT

MEGABEAST SALAD

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

EASY, DELICIOUS LUNCH IDEAS

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.

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.

To learn more about how to prepare vegetables that even vegetable-haters will like, check out https://www.precisionnutrition.com/kitchen-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 roasted potatoes
2 handfuls salad greens
½ - 1 cooked sausage
1 large avocado slice
2 cherry tomatoes

Spread roasted 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 green 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.

For the full article explaining this infographic, visit https://www.precisionnutrition.com/kitchen-tips-tricks-infographic

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