

Managing Picky Eaters

Sandra Niissenberg, MS, RD

What a surprise I had yesterday when I was preparing dinner. My 16-year old son said "Hey Mom isn't that the salmon I like?" To top it off, he ate two portions. Now you have to realize that my children, although exposed to many healthy foods since they were babies, are typical teenagers. They prefer foods any other teen would want - pizzas, burgers, Fettuccini Alfredo, tacos and the like. I have been preparing the same recipe for salmon teriyaki for years. Actually salmon shows up on my table at least once or twice a month. I was floored when my son actually said he likes salmon.

As a dietitian specializing in childhood nutrition who offers helpful suggestions to parents on how to feed their kids, handle picky eaters, and have fun with food, I felt like everything I had been preaching over the years had finally paid off. I tell parents that sometimes it takes at least 10 to 12 offerings of a food for a child to even taste and accept it. I guess after all these years, my son has moved past the acceptance and now into the enjoyment of the dish.

Here Are Some Tips On Feeding Picky Eaters

- Everyone has favorite foods. Do not try to push your favorites onto your children. Allow them to sample foods and to choose their own favorites.
- If one dish is not accepted, try a different preparation option. Some children do not like broiled foods, others may not like steamed.
- It is not uncommon for kids to have "food jags", where they request the same food day after day. Typically their choices are healthy options such as peanut butter and jelly sandwiches or pizza. It is likely that you will become frustrated long before your child when it comes to making a change.
- For young children offer simple solutions, like cut up fruits and vegetables, peanut butter on apple slices, applesauce, fun shaped pasta or maybe even veggie pizza on a whole wheat English muffin or tortilla. Every little change helps to make another one easier down the road.

SuperKids Nutrition

www.superkidsnutrition.com • saving the world one healthy food at a time™

© Superkids Nutrition Inc. 2009



- Get kids involved, whether they help with food shopping or preparation. The more opportunities they have to experiment with food, the more they will enjoy food. Let them touch foods, smell foods, and play with foods. Chances of eating the food along the way become greater when children feel comfortable with them. Try decorating a pizza, building a sandwich or rolling tortillas.
- Watching parents prepare food helps create healthy food behavior in kids and increases quality family time.
- Be a good example. Kids learn what they see. If you eat the food, they will most likely eat it too.

While you shouldn't force a food on a child, the experiences they have seeing the food and watching you eat it are worthwhile. You may also add practical advice as to what may be offered at all meals. For example suggesting adding whole grains, applesauce or carrot sticks to balance out a meal. Know that even if a child sometimes "doesn't eat", they won't starve. Keep in mind your habits are modeled by your children. For example, if you watch television while eating, your children will likely grow up doing the same. Offer the most nutritious foods at the beginning of the meal when your child is most hungry. Do not let your children fill up on a beverage before the meal either. Start with some water, but wait on the milk or juice until some food has been consumed.

These and more tips and family favorite recipes can be found in *Quick Meals for Healthy Kids and Busy Parents*, S. Nissenberg, MS, RD, John Wiley & Sons, and at www.kidsliketoeat.com.

Sandra Niissenberg, MS, RD is a registered dietitian and author in the Chicago area, currently working full time as a cookbook editor.

SuperKids Nutrition



www.superkidsnutrition.com • saving the world one healthy food at a time™

© Superkids Nutrition Inc. 2009