

11 Tips and Tricks to Get Your Kids to Eat Healthy

Kids can learn to love fruits and veggies too!

By Laura Miller, Publisher of Macaroni Kid Appleton-Waupaca-Oshkosh, Wisc.

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Adults always seem to want to begin new habits involving losing weight and/or eating healthier. But don't overlook what your kids are eating too. After all, childhood is the best time to get your kids started on a lifetime habit of choosing healthy foods.

My 11-year-old daughter is amazing about eating her veggies and has turned out to be quite a little foodie and my 6-year-old son is well on his way to the same, but it took a while to get to this point... with a little trial and error. Here are 11 things we've done that have helped our kids make better food choices.

1. Offer something to dip food into



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It can be veggie dip, ketchup, BBQ sauce, salsa, nut or seed butter -- when you're a kid, everything is better with dip!

2. Offer food in the order you want them to eat it

In our house that means protein and veggies first followed by carbs, fruits and, finally, treats.

3. Plate food in a way that makes it special

- Make a fun shape (like an animal or funny face).
- Create a rainbow and try to find something of every color they will eat... tomatoes, carrots, yellow peppers, green beans, blueberries, grapes... and more!
- Serve different foods that are all the same color!
- Use a special plate/bowl, spoon, chopsticks, etc. Sometimes my daughter used baby brother's spoon for her applesauce... I say, whatever gets the job done!
- Put a face on it. For food like bananas and oranges where you remove a thick peel before eating, use a permanent marker to draw a funny face.

4. Serve food prepared in different ways

They don't like something the first time? Try it prepared another way. That way you'll find out if it's just preparation they don't like or truly that particular food. My daughter hates raw broccoli but loves it cooked. Meanwhile, my husband doesn't like broccoli mushy, so I lightly steam it to make both of them happy. She also likes her carrots raw and her peas still frozen!

5. Let your child try something new... even if you don't think they're going to like it. And keep that thought to yourself! Don't let your opinions affect theirs. My daughter eats raw onions by the handful, and I never would have guessed she would like seaweed and mussels!

6. Offer a choice from two or three vegetables

Then let them choose the one they want... peas, cucumbers, or carrots today?

7. Ask your child to take two bites

Most of us have heard of the one "no thank you" bite, but at our house, we do two bites. The first bite is to find out what the food tastes like. There might be some surprises, like when my son found out that grape tomatoes do NOT taste like grapes! Once they know what to expect, ask them to try one more bite to see if they like it, now that they know



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what it tastes like. There have only been a couple of times that my kids rejected a food after the second bite... and now my son LOVES tomatoes!

8. Have your child help acquire the food

They're more likely to try it if they've helped get the food, whether it's letting them choose what veggies to buy at the grocery store, taking them out picking seasonal fruits and veggies, or growing your own. We love picking strawberries and blueberries and growing cucumbers, green beans, and tomatoes.

9. Let your child prepare their own food

When she was around 6 years old, my daughter started making her own sandwiches and they were always the "best" sandwiches she had ever eaten (or so she said!). You can also find kid-safe knives so they can help prepare meals.

10. Write a "recipe" or "menu" with your child

Then follow it to make lunch or a snack. Examples of easy menus or recipes for young kiddos:

- Sandwiches (PB&J, cheese, turkey/ham, etc.)
- Ants on a log
- Sliced apples with peanut butter

My daughter prepared the recipe below for pancake sandwiches after her Kindergarten teacher saw them in her lunchbox and commented on how yummy they looked.

11. Get creative and try new things!

That might mean that mom or dad might try something they think they don't like too!

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