

8 Creative Ways to Observe Proper Nutrition in Your Household

For parents, making sure that their children are properly fed is a top priority. There is hardly another task that would get moms and dads consulting their kids' pediatricians, flipping through books and scouring the internet for information and tips more than selecting food groups for their children and making meals.

Why? Because mealtimes aren't as straightforward with kids as they are with adults — when you set a plate of food down on the table in front of a kid, there's no guarantee that all the food will be eaten, or even touched. Ask any parent — they're sure to say that trying to get little kids to even taste the food on their plate is a battle that rages on every single day.

Why do kids become picky with food?

Children have been known to become pickiest with food (as well as the most reluctant to try new foods) around the age of two. **Various factors can contribute to this fussy behavior** — the child's perceptions and feelings toward food, their parents' representation of the food, social cues, environmental influences, and the like.

A parent's primary concern

Children may not be getting the nutrition they need when they refuse to eat what's on their plate. Kids may be taught that fruits, vegetables, lean meats and whole grains are good for their bodies, but that doesn't mean that they will eat all these at the dinner table.

To ensure that your kids get the nutrition they need for proper growth and development, you need to roll up your sleeves and get creative with mealtimes. With a little work and a good dose of childlike imagination, you can help your kids feel excited and happy to eat every day.

Give these creative ideas a try:

- Stick to a schedule.

Kids should be fed every three to four hours; that includes three meals, a couple of snacks in between, and plenty of fluids. Follow a feeding routine and your **kids will learn to focus on eating at these times.**

- Plan meals in advance.

When you shop regularly and have the ingredients you need at home, it's easier to put together balanced meals that showcase all the healthy [food groups for children](#) — and you won't be tempted to just order fast food because you don't have the time to cook.

- Make meals for the whole family.

Rather than cooking one dish for the adults and one dish for the kids, make time **to serve meals that the whole family can enjoy.** This sends a positive message to the kids — they won't think that some foods are "for adults only" or that they will always be served only the foods that they are sure to eat.

By having the same food on all your plates, you can present a good example because you eat the nutritious food yourself.

- Be gentle about introducing new foods.

Kids are more likely to try new foods if these are **frequently presented** on their plates — it may take 20 tries before they start tasting and eating certain foods, but they are more likely to do so if they aren't ordered or pressured into it.

- Add secret ingredients to meals.

For recipes that call for milk such as mashed potatoes, oatmeal or certain sauces, you can substitute [child growth products](#) like a nutritional milk supplement, or soy milk. Finely grate carrots and bell peppers into pasta sauce or meatballs. Mash beans into burger patties. This way, the taste of **some foods they may not like can be concealed** by other ingredients, while they reap the benefits.

- Get the kids into the kitchen.

Children can become excited to eat when they've had a hand in making the meal, **so get them involved in the meal preparation process.** Teach them to mix up pancake or muffin batter, cut up fruits and vegetables (if they are old enough to do so with your supervision), assemble their own tacos, burritos, or wraps, squeeze and slice fresh fruits for juices, put or choose their sandwich or burger fixings out of a healthy selection.

- Put care and clever insight into your presentation.

Kids are visually inclined, so making visually appealing meals are a great way to get them to finish their food. Use molds and cutters in fun shapes for eggs, sandwiches, fruits and vegetables. **Create animal or character designs on your kid's plate** using the ingredients of the day's meal. Experiment with bento lunch boxes. Make up fun names for foods they are hesitant to try (e.g., broccoli can be called "baby trees").

- Allow the occasional treats.

Finally, **strictly prohibiting sweets, sodas, candy or fast food can make these items even more enticing** to kids. So compromise — let the kids enjoy sugary cereals at a relative's house if they eat the healthier kind at home. If they crave a sweet drink, prepare a strawberry- or chocolate-flavored nutritional drink as an after-school treat (you can even make popsicles with it). Catch a movie during the weekend and eat at a fast food place afterwards.

By making meal times interesting and offering variety, you can make sure that your child is exposed to all kinds of flavors and gets the nutrition he needs.