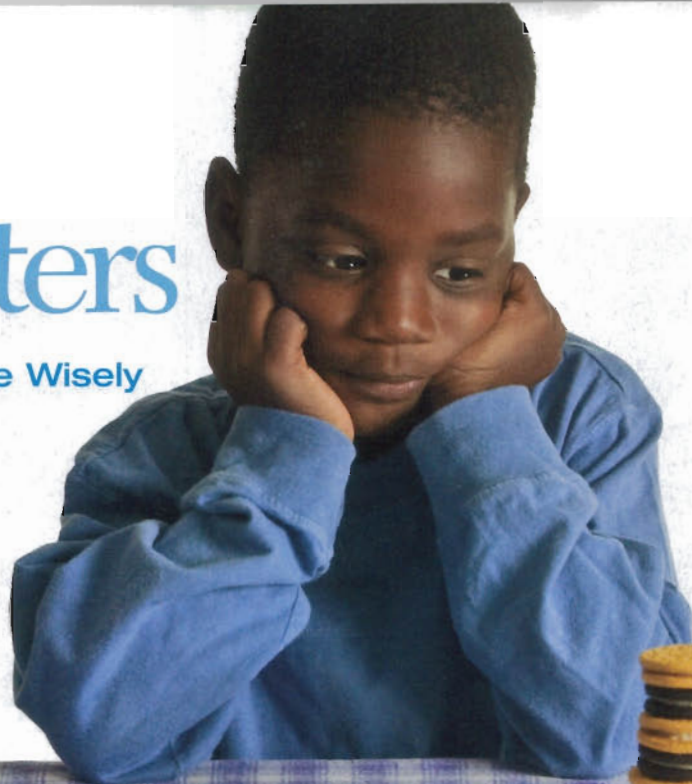


ourkids

# picky eaters

Choosy Kids Can Choose Wisely

by Lynn Machon



**W**e all know that a well-balanced diet, rich with whole grains, protein, fruit and vegetables, helps kids grow strong and stay healthy. But let's face it – getting kids to eat healthy meals can be a tough concept to swallow, especially when dealing with finicky eaters.

## HEALTHY HABITS FOR HEALTHY FAMILIES

For nutritionist Karla Bauman, owner of Nutrition Counts in Cameron Park, helping families eat well is a full-time job. Bauman says it's natural for toddlers, in particular, to be picky eaters. "Kids' taste buds are more prominent than ours," she explains. "That's why they tend to stay away from strong tastes and go for the blander, starchy, sugary foods."

For some kids, it's simply the texture, not the taste, of certain foods that's a turn-off. Yet Bauman says even the pickiest of eaters can learn healthy eating habits that will last a lifetime. As a general rule, she advises parents to be patient and not stress over every meal. "Don't look at your child's diet on a daily basis," she says. "Instead, look at their nutritional intake throughout the week."

## EMPOWERING KIDS TO MAKE GOOD CHOICES

The foundation of healthy eating starts in

the home. "It's our responsibility as parents to control where and when food is provided and what's in our house," says Bauman. "If you don't have a lot of junk food in the house, they won't choose junk to eat." But she notes it's also important to empower kids to learn how to eat right and be responsible for their own nutrition.

Even young kids can understand the U.S. Department of Agriculture's dietary guidelines ([mypyramid.gov](http://mypyramid.gov)). Bauman suggests drawing a food pyramid with your kids to help them wisely choose snacks like whole grain crackers and edamame beans. Adolescents and teenagers should be taught how to read ingredient labels and why it's important to avoid things like highly-processed foods and trans fats.

Other ways to get kids excited about healthy foods this summer are to plant a garden together or check out cooking classes offered through your community.

## MAKE APPROPRIATE INTRODUCTIONS

While it's tempting to stick with the same crowd-pleasing meals, picky eaters need to be exposed to different food items in order to expand their culinary repertoire. According to Bauman, when presenting new foods, patience must prevail. "With some kids, it takes up to 19 times of introducing a par-

ticular food to get it to stick," she says. "Just be persistent, and know it's a process."

"Maybe the first day, the food is just on your child's plate," she explains. "Then the next day, ask them to try one bite and go from there." Allowing children to dip fruit and veggies into things like peanut butter, yogurt, hummus and salad dressing can often increase your success.

## SNEAKING IN SUBSTANCE

If you are still concerned that your child is not getting adequate nutrition, there are easy ways to sneak the good stuff in.

"When you're making a recipe, like cookies or pancakes, put some ground flax, bran or whole wheat flour in," says Bauman. You also can substitute applesauce for some oils when baking.

Other ideas include adding seeds and nuts along with pureed or finely chopped vegetables to pasta sauces and soups, or shredding zucchini and carrots into casseroles and meatloaf.

Stir-fry dishes also are a great way to hide extra veggies kids might not eat as stand alone. Similarly, adding protein powder and "power fruit" like blueberries to smoothies can help pack a nutritious punch. •

For tips to encourage healthy eating habits with finicky eaters, visit [stylemg.com](http://stylemg.com).