



Green Plate Kids
Yummy • Healthy • Plates to Go

Do you have a picky eater?

Do you assume your child will never experience the pleasure of eating escargot and coq au vin? Are you doomed to a lifetime of preparing dinosaur shaped chicken nuggets? Life does not have to be that bland or monotonous. With a little guidance, a lot of patience and a small understanding of child development, you can look forward to fuss-free meals that include a variety of foods that your whole family actually eats and enjoys.

Some kids are born to be adventurous. They dive into new activities and situations without a second thought and they are willing to try all kinds of foods without prodding. Most kids like to assess a situation before jumping in. This is especially true for food.

For the first 4 to 6 months of life, the only food we receive is a warm, sweet beverage in the form of formula or breast milk. The next 6 months are a constant barrage of new tastes and textures as various solid foods are introduced. Most babies are willing to accept these new foods without too much fuss but sometime between the first and second year, the fights over food begin. It seems like in one day, your sweet baby goes from eating anything you dish up to refusing to eat anything at all. This event is a normal part of child development and has 2 main reasons for occurring.

- 1) Caloric needs drop at 1 year of age because the rate of growth is slowing down.
- 2) Your child is trying to exert some control over their life. Your child is much more interested in figuring out walking and talking than in eating and they are not afraid to let you know their opinion.

This is the prime time for parents and caregivers to start doing anything they can to get their children to eat a full meal: making 2 or 3 different meals until you hit upon what your child will eat for dinner, limiting food choices to only those items your know your child will eat, bribing children with dessert or other treats for “clearing their plate.” You know that none of these behaviors lay the groundwork for healthy food habits but what are you supposed to do? The following list of tips can get you back on the path of feeding those you love without tears (theirs or yours):

1. **Be a good role model** - Show your children healthy food habits and they will eventually follow suit.
2. **Make mealtime family time** - Teach your children that meals are about being social as much as they are about eating. Take this time to learn about their day and talk about yours.
3. **Provide healthful choices and variety** - Kids will not learn to eat new foods if they are never provided the opportunity. Be patient, it will take time for kids to be willing to try new foods. Putting some on their plate is the first step.





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4. **Offer and try new foods** – Be willing to try new foods as well. Make it an adventure for the whole family.
5. **Drink water first. Limit juice to less than 4 fl oz per day** – If your kids fill up on beverages, including juice and milk, they are less likely to be hungry for solid foods.
6. **Serve appropriate portion sizes** - Small children have small tummies. They don't need a lot of food and large portions can be overwhelming.
7. **Provide fresh, “homemade” food** – There are plenty of fast, healthful and convenient foods that do not require too much effort to prepare. Fast food drive thru does not have to be the answer.
8. **Do NOT coerce or force feed!!!** This will only add fuel to the food battle fire.
9. **Model an active lifestyle and do activities together as a family** – Get your kids used to moving their bodies. Active bodies are hungry bodies and hungry bodies are more willing to eat.
10. **Minimize distractions** – Turn off the tv and hang up the phone. Enjoy this time with your family and show them eating together is important.
11. **Make mealtime fun** - This is not the time to break out your clown suit but if the dinner table is a place that provides smiles and pleasure, your children will see mealtimes and eating as social and pleasurable.
12. **Get your kids involved in the meal planning and preparation** - If your kids have say in what is made and see how it is made, they are more likely to eat it.
13. **Gradually change recipes to healthier options** – Lasting changes are made by taking small steps. As you incorporate these behavioral changes at the table, gradually incorporate healthier foods at the table. Green Plate Kids has a great variety of healthful choices that let you enjoy mealtime with your family.

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September 2010*

