

Why You Should Let Kids Choose the Healthy Recipes to Try at Home

Deciding what goes on the dinner table and making the actual preparation for meals at home are tasks that are traditionally taken up by the adults within a household. It's a typical family scene — mom or dad (or both) moving around the kitchen, chopping this, boiling that, checking something else in the oven, until the madness slowly settles down to reveal the table laden with plates of food, and mom calling for the children upstairs to come down, dinner's ready.

Mealtimes can be hit or miss in a home with kids. Despite all the care that parents put into preparing food for the little ones, there's no guarantee that the children will always clean their plates, or even try a few bites of a certain dish. Younger children in particular can be quite persistent in refusing new foods and sticking to the flavors and ingredients they are familiar with.

And herein lies a common parenting dilemma: *How can I be sure that my young child is getting the nutrition he needs if he only wants to eat the same things over and over?*

Here's a solution that you can try: [Let children choose recipes](#) to try at home.

A creative experiment

Having just pointed out that young children can be quite picky when it comes to food, this suggestion may raise some eyebrows among parents. How would that work — wouldn't the kids simply choose to eat their favorites again and again? That would mean endless meals consisting of simple proteins (such as chicken nuggets), sweets (cookies and ice cream), the occasional fruit (apples and bananas), sugary drinks (juices and sodas), and none of the nutritious things, like vegetables?

Well, first things first. Getting your children to truly enjoy mealtimes at home, and at the same time teaching them to love healthful dishes and snacks, will require going through a couple of important steps — and parents need to guide their children at each stage.

Here's how to do it.

1. Get the children involved in meal planning and preparation.

You may be hesitant to let your young ones into the kitchen and allow them to help you put a meal together, for a number of reasons — kids make messes, they have to be supervised around utensils and appliances that could potentially cause injuries, it will take longer to finish than if you were to do it by yourself, they refuse to participate, and the like.

However, it pays to be patient and help the kids find their way around the kitchen at an early age. Here are just a few reasons to teach children about food and cooking, and to choose the recipes served at home, early on in life:

It teaches kids an important life skill.

When parents take on all the kitchen duties, a child will learn to expect meals to always be served to him. When he comes home from school, he will rummage through the refrigerator or the pantry for ready-made snacks that come in boxes or packages.

Teach your child early about food, how to use ingredients to make a meal from scratch, and actually put a meal on the table, on the other hand, and you will be raising an individual who will be more likely to prepare meals from scratch several times a week when he becomes an adult. Whether he is at home, in his apartment at university, or vacationing abroad on his own, he will know how to gather ingredients and put together a meal — he will become independent and self-sufficient.

It helps children understand and choose what they put in their bodies.

Relying on fast food deliveries, takeout, or microwave dinners to feed your children sends them a negative message about nutrition — it limits their knowledge of food to what food companies offer and discourages them from making healthier and far tastier choices.

When you make breakfast, lunch, snacks or dinner from scratch, you get to choose what ingredients (and therefore, what nutrients) you and your family consumes. You won't be ingesting as much salt, sugar and fat as you would be from eating processed foods. There won't be any preservatives and artificial colorings and flavorings in your meals, either. And that means healthier families all around.

It shows young ones the importance of having the whole family sit down to a meal every day.

Mealtimes provide the best opportunities for families to bond. From preparing the meal to sharing the food at the table, parents and children get quality time to talk about their day, witness the little one's precious milestones, and simply be there with each other.

2. Show the young ones how their favorite foods can be made healthily.

Once your child becomes interested in participating in the kitchen, the next step is to let him pick out the foods that he wants to eat. This is where you can collaborate with the little one to achieve the ultimate goal: to get your child to eat (and love) nutritious and delicious things.

The key is to take note of the foods that your child chooses and to show him how it can be made using healthful ingredients. This way, your child will get his favorite meals, and you'll be confident that he is getting the nutrients he needs to grow and develop into a strong, healthy child.

Here are a few examples of how a child's food choices can become staple [healthy kids' meals/recipes](#) in your home.

If your child wants to eat:

- Chicken nuggets — Instead of ordering these from a fast food joint, make your own chicken nuggets or fingers from healthy, lean chicken breasts that you coat in homemade breading and bake in the oven instead of frying. And always pair these with steamed or stir-fried vegetables like broccoli, carrots, or spinach.
- Pizza — Gather together tomato sauce and healthy toppings like shredded or diced meats, bell peppers, mushrooms, olives, cheese, herbs, and seasonings and let your child assemble them as he likes. Your homemade pizza will have less salt, oil or butter than those that get delivered to your home.
- Burgers and sandwiches — For burgers, make your own patties and always include vegetables like lettuce and tomato, plus a homemade dressing for added flavor. Sandwiches can also be fun to make since there are countless combinations possible — you can even make wraps using your child's favorite proteins and some tasty vegetables.
- Sugary drinks — Rather than drinking sodas and fruit-flavored beverages, your child can enjoy flavored waters or fresh fruit smoothies with some honey. For a creamier drink, you can add regular milk, yogurt or a [nutritional supplement](#) like PediaSure. You'll be able to control the amount of sugar that goes into these drinks.
- Baked goods — Muffins, cakes, bars and cookies baked right at home can be made more delicious and nutritious if you play with all kinds of ingredients — use different fruits (lemons, berries, stone fruits, and such), nuts or seeds, and spices to give them a big boost in flavor and nutrition.
- Ice cream — You can make ice cream using fresh fruits and milk or cream. Also, mixing blended fruits with the favorite balanced milk supplement to make popsicles means your child can always have a cool, yummy and healthy after-school treat.

When your child is involved in the process of choosing what to eat at home and preparing that meal from scratch, he learns to be patient, make an effort, use different ingredients to create the flavors and textures he likes, and take pride in what he has created. Because of all that, he will be very happy to eat and enjoy a delicious, nutritious meal.