

Five ways to please picky eaters

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Picky eaters can miss out on a lot of good food. Not only can it be challenging cooking for folks who refuse to eat some foods, but they can also miss out on important nutrients found in foods often on the I-Don't-Eat list like green vegetables, salads, fruit, skinless poultry and fish, beans, legumes, and nuts, low-fat dairy or whole grains.

The American Heart Association says a key measure for improving and maintaining cardiovascular health is to [eat better](#). The Association's Kids Heart Challenge encourages families to aim for overall healthy eating patterns that include whole foods, lots of fruits and vegetables, lean protein, nuts and seeds.

This heart-healthy eating approach is shared with students in schools across the country. Elementary school teacher, Chuck Larimer of Stayton Elementary School, just outside Salem, Oregon has been part of Kids Heart Challenge for 23 years. "I try to involve everybody in our school," Larimer said. "This year our school has 355 students."

Larimer and educators like him share heart-healthy principles with students. The children and their families learn how to care for their bodies and how to treat others with kindness and respect.

As we celebrate the 50th anniversary of National Nutrition Month, here are five tips to nourish your family with healthful foods and help return some harmony to mealtime.

1. No short-order cooking

Plan meals to include at least one thing that everyone likes (even if it's the baked beans for the vegetarian or the dessert of fruit and low-fat, no-added-sugar yogurt parfaits!). Then serve one meal for everyone in the family; no exceptions. The alternative habit of preparing different foods for everyone is exhausting and it can take much longer for children to learn to like new foods.

2. Remember it takes 11 tries to accept something

It's a normal for children to be cautious of new things—including [food](#).

Research has shown it sometimes takes 11 tries for a child to decide they like a new food. So keep serving broccoli—and even allow a child to touch it or play with it to learn about how it might feel in their mouth. Always ask that they take one bite.

3. No clean plate club

Help kids focus on eating until they are full rather than finishing every last bite on their plate. Sometimes [adults](#) forget that small children have small bellies; a good rule to remember is: 1 tablespoon of food per age of the child for each dish (about two or three dishes). So a three-year-old child should receive 3 tablespoons each of peas, noodles and chicken.

4. Shop and cook with the kids

Kids are more likely to taste a dish if they helped plan or prepare it. Letting kids choose veggies in the supermarket produce section or even in the frozen food aisle will empower them. Involve them with age-appropriate tasks such as stirring, chopping or measuring ingredients; this will allow them to contribute to a project in which they are proud to share and eat! This technique works with picky adults/teens too: Asking them to help with the shopping and cooking gives them investment in the final product and greater curiosity to try it.

5. Serve smart snacks

One of the very best ways to get kids (and adults) accustomed to eating fruits and veggies is to serve them when they are really hungry at snack time. Veggies and hummus are a simple way to nourish [children](#) for play or homework—but not overfill their bellies so they aren't hungry for a wholesome dinner. Serving salty chips, cookies or even sugary granola bars and artificially-flavored gummy "fruit" snacks can be a quick

option, but not the healthiest solution. Also serve snacks when kids are hungry, but not too close to meal time.

For nearly 45 years, the American Heart Association has been partnering with educators in elementary, middle and high schools across the nation to help educate students about healthy living.

The Kids Heart Challenge and American Heart Challenge [school](#) programs provide unique age-appropriate curriculum and activities. Students and educators have the tools needed to support both mental and physical well-being in students, families and staff, all while making a difference by raising funds to save lives.

Provided by American Heart Association

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