

<https://www.snap4ct.org/snap4ct-blog/easy-tips-for-feeding-picky-eaters-on-a-budget>

## Easy Tips for Feeding Picky Eaters on a Budget

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If you have a picky young eater in your family, you are not alone. Children often resist eating healthy foods once they get a taste for sweets or fun foods like mac & cheese, pizza, or chicken nuggets. But, you CAN help them form healthy eating habits with a little patience! Here are four tips to help your picky eater eat well while you spend less.

### Tip 1 - Let Kids Help

Everyone enjoys a little independence and the freedom to choose. This is especially true for young children who are just learning how to ask for what they need and want. By allowing your little ones to help you with meal planning and cooking, you give them confidence and teach them important life skills.

- Start in the store by letting your child pick out different fruits and vegetables to try. Use this [MyPlate Grocery Store Bingo Game](#) (PDF) to get them excited and to keep them occupied.
- Give them an easy task at mealtime, like washing the fruits or veggies, or setting the table. Remind them how important they are to the family and how much you appreciate their help.



## Tip 2 - Make Simple, Fun Meals

Kids generally prefer mild flavors and meals with simple ingredients. And of course, they want things to be fun. You can make meals more hands-on by creating food stations. Prep basic ingredients and put them on the counter (or the table) where your child can fill their own plate. Try to include each of the five food groups of **MyPlate**, so that you are sure they are getting plenty of nutrients.



Here are some “make your own” meal ideas that kids love:

- **Taco Bar** – Cook up a protein like **beans**, grilled chicken, ground turkey, or lean beef, and serve along with chopped tomatoes, shredded lettuce, shredded carrots, grated low fat cheese and whole grain taco shells or tortillas. For more adventurous kids, offer black olives, salsa, avocado, or chopped onions.
- **Build Your Own Pizzas** – Serve **whole grain pitas**, English muffins, or whole wheat flour tortillas, along with tomato sauce and grated low fat cheese. Suggest your child make a face on their pizza using chopped veggies (canned mushrooms, black olives, green or red peppers, or onions work great).
- **Dinner Dipping** – Kids love to dip! Assemble a tray of cut up proteins (such as chicken, sliced hard boiled egg, or deli turkey); mild vegetables like cucumbers, baby carrots, celery, cherry tomatoes (cut in half to prevent choking); and let your kids dip in salad dressing, honey mustard sauce, hummus or a **bean dip**. Follow up with apple slices or cut banana with yogurt **Fruit Dip** for dessert. [Find healthy **Dip Recipes here**]
- **Mix-It-Up Oatmeal Jars** – Oatmeal is an inexpensive whole grain. Prepare using milk for extra nutrients, and then let your child top it with fruit and nuts and a drizzle of honey\* for sweetness. Serve in mason jars or in your child’s favorite glass to make it even more fun. [\*Do not give honey to children under 1 year of age.]
- **Fruit Yogurt Parfaits or Yogurt Banana Split** – Nonfat, plain yogurt is great any time of day. Pair it with whole grain cereal and healthy toppings like nuts and dried, fresh, or canned chopped fruit. Kids will love being able to build their own layered parfait or a healthy banana split as a meal.

### Tip 3 - Serve Water or Milk

This is a biggie! Water is the BEST drink for kids. It's inexpensive, it won't cause cavities, and it has no calories. Milk is also a healthy option because it has calcium and vitamin D which are important for healthy bones and teeth.

Soda and other drinks with sugar can lead to unhealthy weight gain and painful cavities. Juice may seem like a healthy choice, but it is actually too high in natural sugars. If you are trying to get your child to stop drinking juice or soda, you can begin by diluting it with water so that their taste buds can adjust. Or serve one of our **5 Flavored Water Choices**.

***Did you know?***  
***Soda has as much sugar as ice cream!***

*Watch the video to learn more:*



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### Tip 4 - Try, Try, Try Again

It can be expensive to make meals that your child won't eat – and frustrating too! So start by offering small amounts of new foods with foods they already enjoy. For example, serve chicken nuggets with carrot sticks – another finger food that can be fun.

Or, try adding veggies in new ways. Cooked broccoli and cauliflower have a much milder flavor than the raw versions, and they can be blended into soups and mashed potatoes. This helps children get used to their taste. "Hiding" vegetables in other foods gives your child more nutrients, but it won't help them develop the healthy habit of choosing fruits and vegetables on their own. So, try not to rely on that trick all of the time.

Don't be discouraged if your child refuses new foods. Research has shown that sometimes it takes 7-10 tries before a child will accept and learn to like a new food. Your patience will pay off.

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Make **Mac & Cheese** more nutritious by adding peas, chopped broccoli, or shredded carrots.

Feeding a family, even picky members, does not need to cost a lot. Fill your cart with items from our **Budget Pantry**, and check out our **Grocery Shopping Blogs** for more tips on making the most economical choices.

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## More Help for Feeding Kids

- [Kid-Friendly Recipes](#)
- [Kid-Friendly Zone](#) (PDF)
- [Healthy Snacking Tips](#)
- [Kid-Friendly Veggies & Fruits](#) – *10 Tips for Making Healthy Foods More Fun for Children* (English PDF, Spanish PDF)
- [MyPlate Snack Tips for Parents](#) – (English PDF, Spanish PDF)
- [Produce for Kids](#)
- [Healthy Drinks Healthy Kids](#)