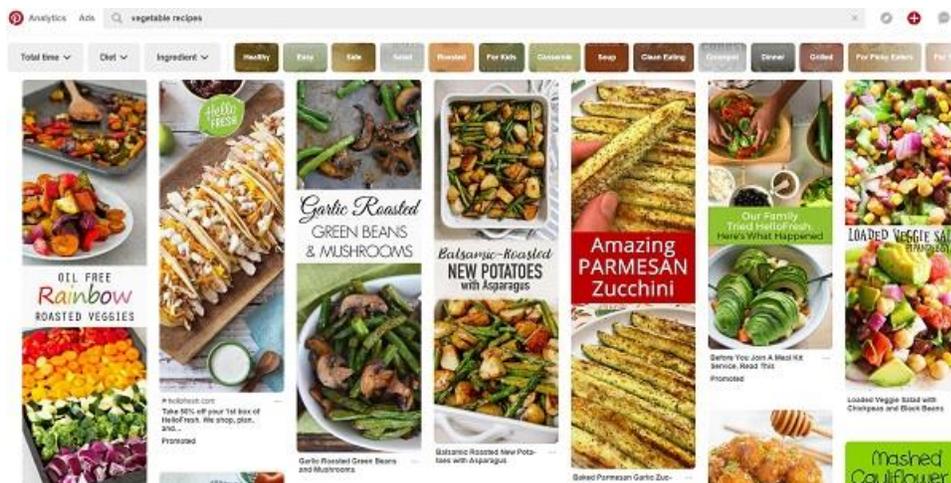


Establishing Healthier Eating Habits

by Kathy Slattengren, M. Ed., [Priceless Parenting](#)



[Picture Courtesy of Pinterest Search for Vegetable Recipes](#)

Do you struggle to get your kids to eat healthy? If so, you have plenty of company! While it seems like it should not be that difficult to have children eat plenty of nutritious food, for many it's an ongoing struggle.

When there's tension around what your kids are eating, it adds stress to every meal. It doesn't have to be that way. Changing your approach so that healthy eating is no longer a battle is worth the effort.

Recognizing Eating Issues

How do nutrition-smart parents raise kids who exist on mac and cheese, yogurt, goldfish crackers and chicken nuggets? Your nutritional knowledge can unintentionally help you justify feeding your children junk food. If you find yourself saying "well at least it has Vitamin C", you've fallen into this trap!

Do you need to adjust your family's eating habits to be healthier? These signs indicate a need to make some changes:

- You find yourself begging your kids to eat just two more bites.
- You battle with your kids over eating enough fruits and vegetables.
- Your children are overweight.
- Your children often aren't hungry at meal time.
- You justify poor food choices with saying things like "at least it has protein".
- Your children typically eat something other than what is being served for dinner.
- Meal time is filled with tension.
- When you eat at someone else's house, you bring special food for your child.

If any of these signs resonate with you, it's time to make some changes.

Establishing Healthy Eating Habits

Dr. Dina Rose discusses helping kids eat well in her book, [It's Not About the Broccoli: Three Habits to Teach Your Kids for a Lifetime of Healthy Eating](#). She focuses on teaching your kids healthy habits that will last their lifetime.

She identifies three key habits:

1. **Proportion.** We eat foods like fruits and vegetables more often than we eat foods like hot dogs or crackers.
2. **Variety.** We eat different foods from day to day.
3. **Moderation.** We eat only when we're hungry, and we stop when we're full."

Rose determines proportion by which group an item falls into. Food is divided into three groups by how often it should be eaten:

1. growing foods – natural foods like fruits, vegetables, nuts, meat
2. fun foods – natural foods that have been modified like cheese, hot dogs, French fries, chocolate milk, yogurt, macaroni and cheese, peanut butter sandwiches
3. treat foods – candy, cookies, crackers, chips, ice cream, soda, sports drinks

You might have a slightly different view on which category a food item belongs in. For example, she puts creamed spinach in the fun foods category. While it is a modified natural food, I would still put it in the growing foods category!

No matter what category you decide a food belongs in, your kids should be getting the most from the growing foods category. To accomplish this snacks and meals need to include fruits, vegetables, nuts or meat.

If your children are in the habit of having treat foods for snacks, it's time to switch over to more growing foods. Having a vegetable dip or yogurt dip for fruit can make the change a little easier.

Cooking Healthier Meals

Whenever possible, involve your kids in making the meal. Even young children can help out with simple tasks like tearing lettuce for a salad. Older kids can help find nutritious recipes that they'd like to try making. The more involved kids are in creating the meal, the more likely they are to eat it.

Giving your body the best chance to be healthy involves eating primarily growing foods. Kris Carr has lived with a rare and incurable stage IV cancer for over 10 years. Her cancer inspired her to change her diet and lifestyle. She shares many recipes including some [delicious smoothie recipes](#) that include vegetables. You may be pleasantly surprised to learn how yummy green smoothies can be!

The internet is a rich source of healthy recipe ideas. A quick search on [Pinterest for vegetable recipes](#) will give you plenty of new ideas.

Incorporating more fruits and vegetables into your kids' diet means buying more of these at the grocery store. Watch what you are putting into your grocery cart. It will be easier to eat healthier if you leave most of the junk food at the store.

Changing your kids' eating habits is a process that takes time. You'll want to improve your kids diet while still making meals enjoyable. Food is a powerful medicine. Eating plenty of growing foods gives your kids the best possible chance for being healthy. That's a reward worth the effort!

Kathy Slattengren is an internationally recognized, inspirational parent educator and founder of Priceless Parenting, <http://www.PricelessParenting.com>. Priceless Parenting offers online [parenting classes](#), [parenting presentations](#) and [parent coaching](#). Parents learn to effectively handle misbehavior while building loving relationships.

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