Creative snacking

Want your child to choose healthy snacks over junk food? Encourage her to dream up and prepare her own imaginative (and nutritious) snacks, and she’ll be excited to eat them. These ideas are a fun place to start.

Score a touchdown

Help your youngster cut two pieces of pumpernickel bread into matching football shapes. On one, she could layer apple slices, lean ham, and provolone cheese. Then, she can decorate the top slice with “laces” (perhaps a long green bean with jicama pieces going across). Tip: Suggest that she try various whole-grain breads and healthy fillings to create basketball, soccer, or other sandwich shapes.

Roll into “sushi”

Let your child be a sushi chef. On a sheet of plastic wrap, have her pack cooked brown rice into a rectangle and line up vegetables or fruits along one long edge. The combinations are endless: She might use avocado chunks, diced bell peppers, and spinach leaves. Or she could arrange strawberry halves, blueberries, and pineapple chunks. Help her tightly roll up the filled rice. Refrigerate until firm, and slice.

On your mark...

Your budding engineer can practice her design skills—and eat the results. Together, gather healthy foods, along with straws, toothpicks, and other household supplies. Her challenge is to build a racing car and see how far it will roll (use a clean surface). For instance, she might make wheels from mini cheese rounds or cherry tomatoes and use a zucchini or cucumber for the body. Which design rolls the farthest—and tastes the best?

What you say...what they hear

Just saying “Eat your vegetables” or “Drink your milk” may not get your youngster to eat his veggies or drink his milk. Instead, try strategies like these for encouraging him to have nutritious foods:

- Discuss the food you’re enjoying, not what you’re limiting. For example, if you’re serving fresh fruit rather than cake for dessert, you might say, “These grapes are so sweet, and I love how they pop when I bite them.”
- Rather than telling your child to eat something because it’s healthy, focus on what the food will do for him. You might say, “This breakfast will give you lots of energy so you can run up and down the soccer field the whole time you’re in the game.”
Falling leaves

When the leaves start falling, head out back or to a park so your family can enjoy the season—actively!

Fill the basket. Put out two big baskets, and divide into two teams. Race to see which team can fill its basket first—by scooping up armloads of leaves and running to dump them in.

Create a maze. Together, rake leaves into a maze. You could make a square maze, a circular one, or one that twists and turns. Then, walk or run through its path. Or your child might ride his bike or push toy trucks through the maze.

Toss and catch. Throw handfuls of leaves high in the air. Run around to catch as many as you can as they come down. Count the leaves to see who got the most.

Eat leaves. What? Okay, you’re not going to eat the leaves that fall from trees, but see if your children can name any leaves that we do eat. Hint: Lettuce, cabbage, and spinach are a few examples. After playing in leaves all afternoon, make a salad filled with leaves for dinner.

Pumpkin power

October is for pumpkins. Try these recipes with easy-to-use canned pumpkin, a terrific source of vitamin A and potassium. (Note: Get solid-pack pumpkin, not pumpkin pie filling.)

Parfait
Mix 1 cup nonfat vanilla yogurt with 1 cup pumpkin. In a glass, layer the pumpkin-flavored yogurt with granola. Top with pumpkin seeds.

Hummus
In a food processor, combine 2 cups pumpkin with 2 tbsp. tahini, 1 garlic clove, and 1 tsp. olive oil. Salt to taste, and serve with cut-up vegetables or warmed pita bread.

Chili
In a large pot, heat 1 tbsp. canola oil, and sauté 1 chopped onion. When soft, add 2 cups shredded cooked chicken, 1 can black beans (drained, rinsed), 1 can pumpkin, 1 large can diced tomatoes, and 1 cup frozen corn. Season with 2 tbsp. chili powder, 1 tbsp. cumin, and 1 tsp. cinnamon. Simmer on low heat for 45–60 minutes.

My child is lactose intolerant

After several bouts of terrible stomachaches, our doctor diagnosed our son Ricardo with lactose intolerance. We were glad to know the cause and that it was nothing serious. But then we had to figure out how to manage his eating. Luckily, the school nurse was a big help.

Ms. Clark said Ricardo should stay away from regular milk, ice cream, yogurt, and soft cheeses. But, she said, he can still get the calcium he needs with enriched lactose-free versions. For instance, there’s soy milk, almond milk, rice milk, and lactose-free milk. Another option, she said, is to take lactase tablets or drops just before eating anything with lactose.

Ricardo is getting used to his “new normal,” and so far it hasn’t been too hard. I’m amazed how many lactose-free products are available, and I’m relieved his stomachaches are gone.

Our purpose
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