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5 Strategies for Eating a **VARIETY** of **FOODS**



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WELCOME

I am frequently surprised by how challenging it is for me to accomplish my goal that our family eat a variety of foods. Introducing new foods is sometimes met with skepticism (or outright displeasure or disgust) and personally I find it frustrating to spend time making a meal just to have everyone turn their noses up at it. Wanting to ensure that our family eats a variety of foods also means that I have to continually plan, experiment, and test recipes, all of which require time and energy ... and all of which seem to be in short supply lately.

BUT THIS GOAL - TO SUPPORT MY FAMILY EATING A VARIETY OF FOODS - IS ALSO ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT TO ME :



Maintaining a healthy diet is a sure-fire way to support health



It helps reduce the likelihood of falling into food ruts



It helps you focus on mealtime behaviors, rather than specific consumption outcomes (“she did eat this” or “he didn’t touch that”)



It makes it cooking easier and more fun!

In the following pages are 5 SIMPLE strategies you I’ve found to be particularly helpful in encouraging my family to have a varied diet. I hope that some of them can work for your family, too!

Happy feeding,



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OUR 5 STRATEGIES INCLUDE:

1. **No repeats.** Don't eat the same thing two days in a row.
2. **Switch the meal.** If #1 is too hard, serve the same thing but at a different meal.
3. **Shop sales.** Especially when shopping fresh fruits and vegetables, stores regularly change what's on sale. So use that to your advantage.
4. **Eat seasonally.** Let the seasons help change your diet, at least every couple months!
5. **Same food, different brand.** Don't give up packaged foods, just try different brands.



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NO REPEATS

One of the easiest ways I know to encourage a variety of foods is to not eat the same thing two days in a row. This does require planning, particularly for that meal that is the hardest for you to get on the table. For me, it is breakfast - I'm usually still on my first cup of coffee and not fully ready to participate in creative meal prep.

PLAN AHEAD

Not eating the same thing two days in a row DOES require planning (sorry), but it doesn't necessarily mean that you have to spend a TON of time preparing. Breakfast is the hardest meal for me to not put on repeat, and thankfully I consider RTE cereal and oatmeal as two different breakfasts. A little bit of planning and setting expectations is really all that's needed.

STOCK UP

When you're trying to diversify meals, make sure you have enough food on hand to do that successfully. Back to my breakfast example, I always make sure I have at least two distinct options for breakfast. So when we have cereal on day one I know that there is at least one other option for day two. (And yes, if the kids want, they can go back to cereal on day three!)

STICK TO YOUR STRATEGY

Your family WILL rebel, especially if they have been used to having the same thing day after day. STAY STRONG. Your family will be okay, and they will adjust. And in the end, you might all find you're a little happier and healthier. Or at least proud that you've been able to make the change.



SWITCH THE MEAL



If you or your kids are particularly resistant to new foods, you can simplify #1 (no repeats) by not offering the same food at the same meal. So, if it's too hard on your son to not eat toast in the morning, as it can be for a certain 3 year old that I know, then have toast for breakfast one day and afternoon snack the next. Even this simple swap can help get you and your kids out of the "same old, same old" habit.

START SMALL

Not to hammer this point, but if making these changes seem too hard, start small. Rather than taking away your daughter's *WHOLE* lunch sandwich, use a different jam, a new bread, cutting it in a different shape, or placing it in a different place on the plate. The objective is to help your kids feel more comfortable with change, not make your life miserable.



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SHOP SALES

Shopping the sale items - particularly for fresh foods - can help increase the variety of foods your family is consuming. This can make meal planning slightly more challenging, however, so you may find yourself doing that on the fly or making a second trip to the store for missing items.

BE FLEXIBLE

If you're shopping sales for fresh foods, meal planning can be a little more difficult because you can't fully plan in advance. But planning meals that can be flexible - i.e. baked chicken with whatever roasted vegetables are on sale - can help you both plan and successfully shop sales.

CHECK PRODUCE READINESS

I know you've been here: avocados are on sale but EVERY.SINGLE.ONE on the shelf needs to be eaten immediately (or in 5 days) and you've planned to use them three days from now. Sometimes sales are determined by the foods that have built up in the stockroom, so foods may be approaching - or just past - its prime. Just check that its stage of readiness will suit your plan!



EAT SEASONALLY

Shopping what is in season - either from a farmers' market, farm stand, your backyard garden, or the supermarket - makes it easier to eat a variety of foods. When eating this way, variety is achieved over a longer time frame (like, over the course of a whole year) and through the use of new and creative ways for consuming the same food. H(ow many different can you find to prepare zucchini?)

FOCUS ON THE POSITIVES

One of the great things about eating seasonally is that foods are generally picked and consumed at their peak flavor, so they taste wonderful. (I find this to be especially true for tomatoes.) So when you're shopping seasonally, focus on what you gain by eating seasonally rather than what you lose by not having something else on your plate.

GET CREATIVE

So ... how many ways *can* you think to eat zucchini? Because at certain times of the year, you'll be eating a lot of zucchini! But it's okay. Get creative. Test new recipes, new methods of preparation, new food pairings. Personally, my favorite way of getting creative is to add chocolate chips to my zucchini bread one week and not the next #justkidding #noseriously

LET YOUR KIDS DECIDE

I know, this sounds like it could be disasterous, but what do you have to lose? Let them wander the farmer's market or produce aisles of the grocery store and select something. My 7 year old came running to me one day begging that we buy an eggplant, which we did. He hated it ... but at least he tried it.



5 SAME FOOD, DIFFERENT BRAND

Similar to shopping sales in the fruit & vegetable aisle, you can look for different brands/varieties/sales in other sections of the store too. We usually have at least one type of cracker in our house, but I try hard to mix up the type and brand of crackers we have on any given week. If we bought Stone Ground Wheat crackers last week, then they are not likely to make it into our cart again this time around.

NOT YOUR WHOLE CART

I don't mean to suggest that your whole cart has to turn over week-to-week. Choose one or two food items (cereal, bread, crackers, salsa, dumplings) for which you're willing to try new brands (or even new flavors) and start there. And don't be discouraged if these new flavors are not an immediate hit; they may take some practice!

MAKE IT FUN

Outside mealtime, hold a taste test. Using the three different brands of butter crackers (dumplings, yogurt flavors, ...) you've selected this month put them all out for comparison. Have your kids taste each and compare their flavors, textures, and colors. Ask your kids to describe what they like and what they didn't and let them rank their top choices.

IT'S OKAY TO HAVE FAVORITES

We all do ... have our favorite ice cream flavor, variety of apple, brand of cheddar cheese. It's okay. And it's okay to keep those in the house. Even everyweek. Let there be some things that are sacred and always around. They will create happy memories.

