

# The Wellness Family

Dr. Cuperus Keeps You Informed

## The Picky Eater

Many parents have a daily challenge with their families: "my kids are picky eaters and won't eat what's good for them". This problem is seen with children of all ages; and it's a very frustrating daily battle, that it seems your child is winning. As a parent you feel you've lost before you start.

So what is the solution? There really isn't one answer. Much of this challenge stems from your own adult relationship with food, meaning that many of your childhood habits are now being passed to the next generation, both the good and the bad.

### ***The Family's Nutritional Lifestyle***

Starting nutrition right for your children actually should begin prior to conception as future parents. Take the time, sit down and review your attitudes and beliefs about what it takes to raise your future family. This may include the family's moral compass, discipline, education and a daily snap shot of your family. Ask yourself what in your childhood background with food may create a food problem for your kids. Then consider the nutritional lifestyle most suited to grow and fuel your child's development.

When parents struggle with their picky-eater(s) the first response should not be, "What's wrong with my child." Rather, remember your child enters this world not knowing what he or she hates or loves about food; for the most part kids learn this relationship from the example a parent sets.

If dad hates vegetables and doesn't eat them, or as parents you don't expand the taste palate of your children by "trying something new," this often creates the picky-eater in the home.

### ***Food Relationships***

So where do you begin? Before you become a parent. Start by reviewing your personal relationship with food. For example, which parent has the bad eating habits and what are they? Consider how the two of you will blend or create new food relationships and expand your knowledge or cooking base with research. There are many books and websites available that take a wellness approach to raising healthier children.

Regarding infants, it's best to go from breastfeeding to organic baby food, and then consider making your own. Develop in advance a strategy to introduce a wide variety of vegetables, remembering the greener they are, the more calcium and minerals are consumed and that vegetables with bright color bring anti-oxidants to their diet. To prevent your child from creating sugar addictions, avoid fruit juices, candy, ice cream and baked goods. The only sugar they should experience is from enjoying natural fruit as they grow older.

Avoid the trap many parents have fallen into, by buying snacks that are marketed by the manufacturers to start unhealthy habits. Cereals, colored crackers and cookies, and other similar foods in this category, are



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not healthy choices when you see the processing, dyes, and flavors added to make these items fun to eat. Also, two of the leading food allergies for children are wheat and corn, which has been attributed to the early consumption of these food items, with corn being most often consumed in the form of a sweetener or additive in food products.

### ***Transition Foods***

A new item introduced as a new healthy and "in" food is transition food for toddlers, packaged and marketed as great for kids and easy for parents. The strategy for snacks is pre-planning healthier options for your family. Finely chopped vegetables like red or yellow peppers, shelled snapped peas, steamed broccoli heads or zucchini. This also includes your natural fruit family, but not fruit rolls and juices that are high-glycemic. In most organic or natural food stores there are many options for gluten-free crackers, cookies and breads (since wheat often is a food-induced allergy, it's a good idea to reduce or eliminate this item). *continued on page 2*

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For breakfast, who says you cannot introduce vegetables as a part of the family meal? Chop up, steam or lightly sauté the veggies, combine protein from eggs or beans to make a complete tasty meal. The bean family is actually a typically overlooked, great source of protein for children. Wrap all this up in a whole wheat or sprout tortilla and you have a healthy breakfast burrito.

For dinners and lunches it is important to find a balance with proteins, vegetables, salads and whole grains. If you are thinking, "How do I start?", realize that there are resources available online and in book stores of recipes that are tasty and fun for children developed by parents who are in the same position as you now.

### **Fun Family Dining**

If you have already created a picky-eater, don't be nit-picky with them; remember it was you who unintentionally taught them. Start by reviewing a week in the life of your family: what do you eat and drink? Then divide your dietary lifestyle into two categories: Wellness or Healthy, Processed/Packaged-Unhealthy, and then add a third column, New Strategy. This is where you list items that you would like to add to get you where you need to go. It's important to take time to evolve your family into the healthier lifestyle; the motivation has to be from you.

Depending on the age of your children, create fun recipes around themes. For instance, "Pirate Night" may include fresh fish, seaweed mash (spinach and mashed potatoes) and stolen treasures (medley of fresh berries) for dessert. Another great example is "Princess Night". The choices available will depend on which princess you are mimicking. For example, Jasmine Night would include Genie chicken cubes and lantern (couscous couscous-a wonderful grain) or

magic carpet dip (hummus) for veggies, and golden jeweled dessert (pineapple cubes with a sprinkle of coconut shreds).

If you have created the Picky-Eater who demands only certain foods, like macaroni and cheese, pizza, hot dogs, fast foods and sweets, you as a parent will need to learn the art of negotiation. Your kids are in a pattern of getting what they want. Start with a strategy of what you will slowly eliminate from your home and dining table and have a plan to replace the status quo with better choices.

### **Commit to Omit**

In the beginning when you are slowly replacing your family's old habits with new ones, it won't be easy. Most children actually win this battle because the parents have not committed to their new lifestyle. However, the encouraging side is that most picky-eater habits can be changed within 90 days if you stick with it.

Small changes that can make this process a little easier include the following:

- Grocery shop without your children – this can help to eliminate aisle battles
- Consider having your older children take cooking classes – they may enjoy being part of the meal preparation process
- Support your children nutritionally using "green" flakes – these can be found in natural food stores and then mixed into other foods

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For more information on healthy eating visit:

[www.icpa4kids.org](http://www.icpa4kids.org)

[www.mothering.com](http://www.mothering.com)

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*Dear Patient,*

*Dr. Cuperus is dedicated to providing you with the absolute best in family wellness care. So take a moment today to discuss with your Family Wellness Chiropractor any concerns you may have regarding your family's dietary needs.*

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