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Kitchen Diva

A Perfect Solution for Picky Eaters

by ANGELA SHELF MEDEARIS

Mealtimes are an opportunity to share time together as a family. If your dinner table has become a struggle between you and your picky children, help is at hand.

Mealtimes can quickly become battlegrounds when parents insist that children clean their plates or eat all of their vegetables. Eating is one of the few areas where young children feel they have control, and their budding independence can easily lead to unpleasant power struggles. The best thing a parent can do is to provide a healthy, nutritious meal, but go with the flow and relax at mealtime. The time shared together is more important than engaging in a power struggle to make the kids finish every last veggie.

Here are some questions about common picky eater problems and answers to alleviate mealtime predicaments.

Q: One day my son is constantly hungry. The next he may hardly touch his food. Then he gets on food jags and wants to eat only cereal for several days. Should I be concerned?

A: Children's appetites can vary from day to day, and children often eat in spurts. While some children may be able to eat regular meals, others may need a series of small meals through the day. Give children credit that they will eat when they are hungry. It's also not uncommon for children to get on food jags and want to eat the same thing meal after meal.

The important thing is to learn your child's individual needs and preferences and not overreact when he won't eat or wants cereal three meals in a row. As long as your child is growing and healthy, he is probably doing fine. If you have concerns about your child's growth rate or health, see your pediatrician.

Q: My 4-year-old twins are so picky about what they will eat that I worry they're not getting a balanced diet. What can I do?

A: There are many ways you can add variety and make foods fun. Here are some suggestions:

- Make smiley faces on foods.
- Add cheese to vegetables or other foods.
- Cut sandwiches into shapes with cookie cutters.
- Make juice-sicles by freezing juice using popsicle sticks.
- Give children choices: "Would you prefer carrot or apple slices?"
- Involve children in shopping for food and planning, preparing and serving meals. Children may be more willing to eat meals that they have helped select and prepare.
- Keep fruit and other nutritious snacks available and accessible.

--Set out healthy ingredients and let children put together their own snack creations.

--Don't allow snacks to take the place of meals.

Remember that most picky eaters will change their eating habits over time, but this usually will happen much sooner if parents avoid power struggles over food.

Serve your picky eater these delicious and nutritious Cheesy Spinach Squares. Most picky eaters make an exception when there's cheese involved. Spinach is a good source of protein, calcium, fiber, iron, niacin, zinc and vitamins A, C, K and B-6. These squares also can be cut into fun shapes using a cookie cutter.



CHEESY SPINACH SQUARES

- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted
 - 3 large eggs
 - 1 cup whole milk
 - 1 cup all-purpose flour
 - 1 teaspoon baking powder
 - 1 teaspoon salt
 - 1/8 teaspoon ground nutmeg
 - 1 pound Cheddar cheese, shredded
 - 1 pound chopped frozen spinach, thawed and drained
 - 1/4 cup grated Parmesan cheese
1. Heat oven to 375 F. Line a 9-by-13-inch rimmed baking sheet or baking dish with parchment paper. Pour melted butter into the prepared pan and spread to coat evenly.
 2. In a large bowl, beat eggs until well-blended. Whisk in the milk, flour, baking powder, salt and nutmeg. Add Cheddar cheese and spinach, and stir until combined. Pour spinach mixture into the prepared pan and spread in an even layer. Sprinkle Parmesan evenly over the top.
 3. Bake until top is lightly browned and juices are bubbling, 30-40 minutes. Transfer to a wire rack and let cool until just warm to the touch. Cut into 2-inch squares or use a cookie cutter to cut into shapes and serve. Makes 6-8 servings.

Angela Shelf Medearis is an award-winning children's author, culinary historian and the author of seven cookbooks. Her new cookbook is "The Kitchen Diva's Diabetic Cookbook." Her website is www.divapro.com.

Stickeler's Answer

Stickelers Answer

1-c, 2-e, 3-d, 4-b, 5-a

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