Picky eaters

If you have a tween or teen who will eat only pasta or PB&J, you're not alone. Picky eaters are everywhere! But there are ways to help—try these strategies to get your child interested in eating a wider range of healthy foods.

Let her choose
Give your teen some control over her food options. At the grocery store, have her pick out items from each category (fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean protein, dairy). Then, give her a shelf in the fridge or pantry that she's in charge of stocking. She'll know her healthy choices, such as low-fat yogurt or dried fruit, will be waiting for her when she gets hungry.

Cook one meal
Parents of picky eaters may be tempted to prepare a separate meal for their kids. Instead, adopt a no-substitutions policy, and make just one meal for your family. Don't make a big deal of what she eats or doesn't eat, and eventually she's likely to try what's on the table. Idea: Serve a dish or ingredient that's new for all of you, and she might be more willing to taste it along with everyone else.

Remix recipes
Take a look at the foods your teen or tween is hooked on. Is there a way to revamp them and introduce new foods? For instance, if she loves French fries, make baked sweet potato or carrot "fries." Mix chopped spinach into the lasagna or spaghetti sauce she normally has. Or swap hamburgers for turkey or veggie burgers with lettuce, tomato, avocado, and a whole-grain bun.

Enjoy the weather
When fall brings unexpected warm days, encourage your teen to use these to her advantage by getting outside for her favorite activities. Whether she's power walking or playing volleyball, she'll feel great soaking in the sunshine before the colder, darker days of winter. Tip: Join her, and you'll get a lift, too!

Just for fun
Q: What has 300 feet but no legs?
A: A football field.

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Meal planning made simple

Busy schedules can really get in the way of putting healthy meals on the table. Make things easier with these suggestions.

1. **Coordinate.** Take a few minutes to look at the week ahead together. Who will be around when? Which days are busiest? When would leftovers be best? Then, work around the obstacles. For example, you might be willing to adjust mealtimes from day to day.

2. **Think ahead.** Knowing what you’re going to make for dinner and having the ingredients on hand is half the battle. Suggest that your tech-savvy tween or teen use a free meal-planning website, such as PepperPlate, to find easy recipes and create shopping lists.

3. **Simplify.** When a recipe is a winner, make a double batch the next time. Freeze the extra portion, mark it clearly with the date, and save it for a night when you’re strapped for time. Another idea is to come up with a meal rotation: Perhaps Monday is stir-fry, Tuesday is baked fish, and Wednesday you pick up a rotisserie chicken because that’s the day everyone gets home late.

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**Q & A**

**Q:** We always go to my sister’s house for Thanksgiving. She’s a great cook, but it’s hard to find healthy options when we stay there. Any thoughts?

**A:** Why not offer to make a side dish or two while you’re there? Your sister would probably appreciate the help, and then you could make something you want your family to eat.

For instance, roast Brussels sprouts, or sauté kale or Swiss chard with a little olive oil and garlic. Or just pick up a platter of raw vegetables to put out during the day—that will give you something healthy to munch on.

Also, go over a few tricks with your family ahead of time. At the big meal, take a little of everything, but in small portions. Spoon sauces and gravies onto a small plate for dipping, instead of pouring them directly on the food. Also, have water rather than soda. With tips like these, you won’t leave your sister’s house feeling quite as full.

**Holiday cooking**

**Q:** We always go to my sister’s house for Thanksgiving. She’s a great cook, but it’s hard to find healthy options when we stay there. Any thoughts?

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**In the Kitchen**

**Breakfast treats**

Start the day right with these quick and healthy breakfast recipes.

**Pumpkin pie porridge**

In a saucepan, prepare ½ cup dry kasha (toasted buckwheat) with nonfat milk according to package directions. Stir in ½ cup canned pumpkin, ½ tsp. cinnamon, ½ tsp. nutmeg, and 1 tbsp. honey until heated through.

**Egg rings**

Slice a large red or green bell pepper into rings (about 1-inch thick). Spray a skillet with cooking spray, and add the rings. Cook until soft, about 2 minutes per side. Crack an egg in the center of each, and cook until set.

**Mug muffin**

Combine ½ cup oat or wheat flour, 1 tbsp. flaxseed, ½ mashed banana, 1 tbsp. honey, and 2 tbsp. berries. Put in a large coffee mug. Microwave for 3 minutes or until a fork comes out clean in the center.

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**Activity Corner**

**Keys to cross-training**

Zumba may be your teen’s favorite physical activity, but it’s best if it’s not her only one. Cross-training—or doing different activities on different days—will work various muscles and build endurance. Plus, it can keep her from burning out on exercise or on one sport. Here are options.

**Gym.** She might be able to use equipment at her school gym, your community center, or a health club that your family belongs to. For instance, she could build up to 30 minutes each on a rowing machine and an elliptical.

**Biking.** For a great lower-body workout, have her ride a bike a few days a week. She’ll strengthen the leg muscles she needs for basketball, soccer, lacrosse, or running.

**Swimming.** If your rec center has an indoor pool, swimming can be perfect for cross-training. It works out the whole body and is easy on knees and other joints.