

SNACK CLUB

Supporting Nourished, Active Children in Kentucky

Making food fun

Creating positive mealtime and snack experiences can help children develop healthy eating behaviors. Try one or more of these ideas to have fun with food and promote healthy eating.

Color. Regularly serving a rainbow of colors gets kids more interested in what is on the plate. The variety of color also encourages them to eat or at least taste the food on the plate. Pops of color can easily be added through small amounts of vegetables and fruit. Pro tip: Plate foods separately rather than trying to sneak them in. Keeping foods separate may minimize tantrums related to new or different foods on a plate. More importantly, plating foods separately gives children a choice as to whether they want to taste that green or purple food.

Serve finger foods or food on a stick. Young children are developing fine and gross motor skills related to eating. Finger foods allow them to practice that coordination. Kids also love food on a stick. Pair with a dip and you are set up to introduce new foods in a fun way. Lollipop or cake pop sticks are great options because they have blunt edges. You might even be able to find reusable ones.

Serve foods of different shapes. Foods come in a variety of shapes and sizes. Try serving a mix of squares, circles, triangles, ovals, rectangles, cubes, or wedges. Different shapes can make plates more interesting. You can also use it as an opportunity to talk about shapes with your child. Let's count how many sides this cheese cube has.

Give food fun names. Rather than serving cooked carrots for dinner, why not serve pirate coins? Children are more willing to taste and eat foods that have fun names. This even works for vegetables! Next time you serve broccoli, try calling it dinosaur trees or something else that speaks to your child's interests.

Do activities to encourage kids to try new foods. There are a variety of games or activities you can do to introduce kids to new foods and get them interested in trying it. Visit your local library and ask about children's books related to healthy foods. Pick a letter or color of the week. Then discuss and taste foods that start with that letter or have that color. Get crafty at snack time. Allow kids to create food art with what you provide. Include one new food in the mix. Plant a garden. Getting kids involved in growing, harvesting, and preparing food can encourage consumption. Have toys that promote healthy foods rather than junk foods. For example, get a farmers' market bag for the play kitchen instead of the ice cream set.

Many of these ideas require minimal time and money. You can keep it simple or get creative as you have fun with children through food.

References

Extension Foundation. (2019, August 15). *Make mealtimes in child care pleasant, easy and appealing*. eXtension Alliance for Better Child Care. Retrieved October 18, 2021, from <https://childcare.extension.org/make-mealtimes-in-child-care-pleasant-easy-and-appealing/>.

Source: Courtney Luecking, Extension Specialist for Food and Nutrition

Copyright © 2024 for materials developed by University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension. This publication may be reproduced in portions or its entirety for educational or nonprofit purposes only. Permitted users shall give credit to the author(s) and include this copyright notice.

Educational programs of Kentucky Cooperative Extension serve all people regardless of economic or social status and will not discriminate on the basis of race, color, ethnic origin, national origin, creed, religion, political belief, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, pregnancy, marital status, genetic information, age, veteran status, physical or mental disability or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity. Reasonable accommodation of disability may be available with prior notice. Program information may be made available in languages other than English. University of Kentucky, Kentucky State University, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and Kentucky Counties, Cooperating.