The Picky Eater Project
6 Weeks to Happier, Healthier Family Mealtimes

Natalie Digate Muth, MD, MPH, RDN, FAAP & Sally Sampson, Founder, CHOPCHOP KIDS

“A BRILLIANT solution to one of parenting’s toughest dilemmas!”
Gail Simmons
Food expert, TV host, and author of Talking With My Mouth Full

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AND

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DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN®
What People Are Saying

*The Picky Eater Project* is a BRILLIANT solution to one of parenting’s toughest dilemmas! Finally, an approachable, practical guide to the question “What’s for dinner?” that instantly helps families, with children of all ages, conquer food phobias, get cooking, eat healthier, and, most of all, enjoy mealtime together!

_**Gail Simmons**_*
Food expert, TV host, and author of *Talking With My Mouth Full*

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Picky eating can cause family stress and can set up children for obesity and other health problems. Natalie Muth and Sally Sampson have ridden to the rescue with *The Picky Eater Project*. This practical book gives parents concrete steps to make mealtimes enjoyable and nutritious.

_**Christopher F. Bolling, MD, FAAP**_*
Practicing pediatrician and Executive Committee Chair of the American Academy of Pediatrics Section on Obesity

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This book sets the whole family up for fun cooking and eating at home with a plan that introduces the pleasure and the joy of tasting new foods. *The Picky Eater Project’s* recipes are delicious, simple to prepare, and teach kids a new level of comfort in the kitchen that will be the basis for a lifetime of healthy eating.

_**Ana Sortun**_*
Co-owner of Oleana, Sofra, and Sarma and author of *Spice*
This book is a recipe to defeat picky eaters. As Natalie and Sally suggest, start early and steer kids toward variety, not toward picky eating. I use these tips with my own kids and patients—and they work.

Stephen Pont, MD, MPH, RDN, FAAP
Medical Director, Texas Center for the Prevention and Treatment of Childhood Obesity

Muth and Sampson present a road map for parents to nurture food-literate children—and also have some fun along the way.

Wendy Slusser, MD, MS, FAAP
Associate Vice Provost, UCLA Healthy Campus Initiative, where food literacy is weaved into the fabric of the educational experience
For my husband, Bob, and children, Thomas and Mariella.
Thank you for all of the joy you bring to my life.

- N. D. M.

To my children, Lauren and Ben, who eat just about everything. And to everyone at ChopChop Kids, who make all of this possible.

- S. S.
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Note: All recipes in this book either appeared in ChopChop or are adapted from recipes in The Fun Cooking Magazine for Families.
Preface

My interest in kids’ nutrition habits and especially picky eating piqued about a decade ago when I had recently completed my nutrition degree and training and was in medical school. I knew enough about nutrition and health to understand the recommendations of what kids should eat. But at the time, without kids of my own, I didn’t fully appreciate the how of actually getting kids to eat healthy foods—foods such as bitter vegetables, which our taste buds as humans aren’t really equipped to like at first. Spending one very stressful and unenjoyable lunch with my sister and her 2 young daughters was the event that set off my pursuit of wanting to understand and implement strategies that would help kids want to be healthy eaters and free parents of mealtime battles and struggles trying to force them to eat their vegetables.

My nieces were about 6 and 8 years old at the time. One liked to eat only carbohydrate foods such as pasta and white breads. The other one was a true carnivore and wanted to eat only protein-loaded foods such as meat and fish. Neither was much of a fan of fruits and vegetables. The only way that my sister could get them to eat in a more balanced way was through coercion and bribes. “Marion, eat some vegetables or you are not getting dessert.” “Annie, you cannot just eat meat! Put some fruit on your plate. You are not getting up until you eat it.” “Please just try one bite. You will like it. Just try it. Come on.”

Not too long after that experience, it was my turn. My son, Thomas, was born in 2008. I knew I had just a couple of years until those battles would likely start brewing in my house unless I did something differently. The first couple of years with him were fairly easy. Like most kids, once he was about 6 months old and ready to begin solid foods, he eagerly ate anything I put in his mouth. But when he got to be about 18 months, he decided he was opposed to anything green. He didn’t care so much for vegetables in general. Then he didn’t really want much fish. No way would he try something spicy. With my son, I didn’t know all the tools and techniques at first, despite my research. Since then, we’ve spent a lot of time undoing his picky eating, experimenting with different strategies that might work. The advice included in
The Picky Eater Project is the culmination of what research plus real-life experience with my son and the children of patients, family, and friends, plus all of Sally’s personal experiences and work with ChopChop magazine and the kids it reaches, shows to work. I’m very happy to report that Thomas is now a much more adventurous eater than I ever imagined he would be when we were in the midst of his pickiness a few years back.

I learned some lessons throughout this journey. With my daughter, Mariella, who is 2 years younger than Thomas, we did things a little differently. Her Picky Eater Project started the day I knew I was pregnant. Between my 2 pregnancies I learned a lot. More research was published that showed we can take a lot of steps very early on to prevent picky eating, such as eating really interesting, flavorful, spicy, and bitter foods during pregnancy to expose the baby to the tastes in the amniotic fluid and continuing to eat those foods often during breastfeeding to further expose the infant. I did exactly that. Now 5 years old, willing to eat absolutely anything, and eager to make healthy choices, Mariella never experienced a picky phase. It might be part luck, but I think some of it is from my concerted efforts before she was even born. That is why we include tips for pregnancy and infancy in this book—because there is a LOT you can do to help prevent it from happening in the first place. But we know most readers are in the midst of picky eating with older kids and working to undo it, like I have done with Thomas. Here is all of our best advice based on current research to undo picky eating and bring some sanity back to mealtimes.

— Natalie Digate Muth
When I was in elementary school, the joke in our house was I ate only on Sundays, when my parents got lunch from a local deli.

Years later, when I was 14, I both expanded and contracted my diet by becoming a vegetarian, eating foods I can describe only as a far cry from what we got in the deli. My mother, a great and adventurous cook with a full-time job, told me she wasn’t going to cook special food for me and I could eat the dinner she prepared, minus the meat. She wasn’t angry but rather matter of fact: if I wanted something else, she said, I should learn to cook, which I did. In fact, it’s probably why I became a cookbook writer.

Twenty-three years ago, I became a mother and had the same very laid-back attitude. Dinner was, and is, dinner. My 2 children mostly ate what we ate; I didn’t cook 2 separate meals, never made them try anything, and didn’t argue over their choices. I never hid a vegetable, I didn’t use food as a carrot or a stick, and I didn’t freak out if they didn’t eat. But when their friends came over, it was a whole other story. This one wouldn’t eat green food, that one wouldn’t eat soft food, and on and on. We mostly used positive peer pressure and overall their friends ate the foods their parents swore they wouldn’t eat.

Today, I run ChopChop Kids (www.chopchopkids.org), the nonprofit publisher of ChopChop: The Fun Cooking Magazine for Families. Our mission is to inspire and teach children to cook and eat real food with their families. I noticed whenever I spoke publicly about the value of cooking with kids, the bulk of the questions I got was about picky eating. More than anything it became what I talked about and ultimately became fascinated with. My answer is always cook with them.

Our hope is that this book will get you to the point where you cook with your kids on a regular basis. Teaching them to cook is a powerful tool in just about every way: it creates connections between generations, cultures, and places; teaches math, science, geography, and self-sufficiency; and is creative and fun.

Honestly, I feel like I’ve been on the same path my entire life. I believe most every child will enjoy most every healthy food, especially if they participate in its preparation.

— Sally Sampson
Acknowledgments

No book on how to help kids adopt healthy and adventurous palates would be complete without the tremendous experiences and contributions of kids and their families who have practiced the tips, experiments, and recipes included in this book, most especially ChopChop magazine readers; Christine, Fran, and their twins, Andrew and Nathaniel; and the stars of this book, Marlo, Corey, and their children, Brooke and Hunter. We are grateful for the energy and enthusiasm as well as the time and commitment all have devoted to not only working toward happier, healthier mealtimes for their families but also being willing to share their experiences in order to help other families achieve the same goal. In addition, we are forever indebted to our own families for their enthusiasm, good humor, flexibility, and ready acceptance of their role as guinea pig in trying out new ideas, recipes, and practical applications of research findings. I (N. D. M.) am also grateful to my great friend and sister, Nikki, and her 2 kids, Marion and Anneliese, whose mealt ime battles sparked my interest in how to raise healthy eaters.

Thank you to Kathryn Sparks at the American Academy of Pediatrics who believed in the idea and brought us together to collaborate on this book and to the whole American Academy of Pediatrics publishing team and the pediatrician reviewers who support this project and helped make this book better. We’d also like to thank Dr David Ludwgwig, who wrote the first Picky Eater series with Sally; KJ Dell’Antonia at the New York Times, who provided us a platform to share early findings of the Picky Eater Project on the Motherlode Blog (now Well Family); and our agent, Carla Glasser, for making possible this book, which we hope will help many families on their journey to happier, healthier family mealtimes.
Introduction

“People’s tastes are not formed by accident.”
— Brian Wansink, PhD, Cornell Food and Brand Lab

As moms to two kids each, as well as a cookbook author and founder of ChopChop: The Fun Cooking Magazine for Families (Sally), and a practicing pediatrician and registered dietitian (Natalie), we have worked with hundreds of families who are committed to raising their children to be healthy eaters. Along the way, almost all of them (including ourselves!) have had to deal with the very common experience of picky eating.

In fact, developing some pickiness is a normal part of childhood development. It is called “food neophobia”—the fear of trying new foods. Two-year-olds are infamous for it. For some kids it can stick around for a while—well into childhood and adolescence, and sometimes even adulthood. But it doesn’t have to. While we may have some innate preferences for certain foods (especially sweet and salty), as Brian Wansink of the Cornell Food and Brand Lab summarizes in his 20 years of research on the subject, “[p]eople’s tastes are not formed by accident.”
Whether you are an expecting parent hoping to stave off picky eating (or undo your own picky preferences before your baby is born) or are the parent of an infant, a toddler, a school-aged child, or a teen, *The Picky Eater Project* offers you a week-by-week plan to help undo picky eating. It is more like having your own personal coach than reading a how-to guide. Each week, we focus on a key theme and then offer some guidance to help you develop your own plan to improve your family’s nutrition and get creative in the kitchen while simultaneously slowly ticking away at picky eating preferences. Along the way, you’ll also pick up some easy cooking tips and recipes, boost your family’s overall well-being and harmony, and have fun at the same time! The tips and tricks from each chapter come to life with the authentic experiences of one family who has successfully completed the Picky Eater Project.

Get ready to embark on a journey that is certain to change the way you approach nutrition, mealtimes, and your relationship with your kids. For best results, we strongly recommend digging in and following the plan as a 6-week series and considering engaging your support system to help you include family members, friends (perhaps they’ll want to do their own Picky Eater Project, too!), and your child’s pediatrician. In a short period, you will see some big changes that will stay with you and your family over time. If later you come to a bump in the road, or if after 6 weeks you still aren’t where you want to be, simply go through the process again (paying special attention to Chapter 8) and further reinforce your changes. Each week has a theme that builds upon the previous weeks. Here’s a quick overview.

**Chapter 1—Week 1: Picky-Free Parenting**

First and foremost, picky eating is not your fault! Picky preferences are normal and expected and, as you may know firsthand, for some kids inherently very pronounced. While you cannot control what your child will and will not voluntarily put into his or her mouth (and we definitely advise against force feeding your kids their vegetables and other healthy foods they refuse to eat!), you can take steps that will help your kids *want* to be more adventurous eaters. In the first week, we show you how with the **10 rules of “picky-free parenting.”**
Chapter 2—Week 2: A Kitchen Revolution

Would your kids be totally content if they ate nothing other than pasta, white bread, macaroni and cheese, chicken nuggets, and other white, bland, and processed foods? Are your mealtimes stressful events where you try to convince your child to eat something with a little more color or variety? Or, maybe you’ve all but given up, preferring to let your kids eat what they want rather than fight about it or worry they will go to bed hungry. If so, you are not alone. In week 2, we show you ways to help your kids start to “train their taste buds” to start to like more flavorful, robust, and adventurous foods. And the best thing is, you don’t have to say a word about it! No need to coerce, beg, or bribe them to try something new. Instead, we will show you how to change the way you purchase, arrange, and prepare foods so your kids try new foods without even realizing it. By putting your picky-free parenting into action, you will progress toward your vision of where you’d like your family to be with their eating habits by making a couple of key observations and setting and monitoring the progress of a few early goals.

Chapter 3—Week 3: The Little Cook

After more than 6 years of publishing ChopChop magazine and coaching hundreds of parents and children learning how to cook together, Sally knows firsthand the magic of involving kids in the kitchen, not only for helping them to become more adventurous eaters but also to gain critical life skills, bond with a parent, and just have fun! This week we practice inviting kids in the kitchen—ideally, early and often—and watch how the experience of cooking together helps a child train the taste buds to try new foods.

Chapter 4—Week 4: A Shopping Adventure

Life gets hectic, especially with kids, and especially those who are rigid in their eating preferences. While grocery shopping isn’t usually what most people think of as a good time, this week we will work on developing grocery shopping as more of an adventure than a chore. We will also work to create easy-to-implement meal plans and grocery lists to help support the positive changes that have been occurring at home.
Chapter 5—Week 5: Family Mini-feast
The value of family meals includes, but extends far beyond, its role in helping children to acquire a taste for a wider variety of interesting foods. This week we strategize how to set up family meals to fit with your lifestyle while also reaping all of the benefits of eating together, including further progress in the pursuit of undoing picky eating. Meal and recipe ideas will give you the tools and guidance you need to put the plan into action.

Chapter 6—Week 6: It Takes a Village
By week 6 it will become abundantly clear that it would be difficult to make these changes alone. From a spouse or partner to the grandparents, siblings, and friends—everyone has a role to play. It takes a village to undo picky eating. This week we will work on the social support teams to help everyone own the change.

Chapter 7—Post–Picky Eater Project: Making It Stick-y
While your Picky Eater Project may officially be complete, we recommend going through our post–Picky Eater Project chapter to help make the changes stick. After all, we can do pretty much anything for a short period of time. But keeping it going for the long haul is imminently more challenging. In this chapter, we plan for challenges and barriers and put the contingency plans into action. Relapses happen. But how we respond to them determines how much of a lasting effect they will have. Just like any other behavioral change, we need a plan for making it stick.

Chapter 8—Troubleshooting
Despite all of your best efforts, you will run into challenges with keeping your Picky Eater Project going. And, in some cases, coexisting physical and mental health conditions can make it that much more challenging. What about food allergies? Sensory integration troubles? Medical diagnoses such as autistic spectrum disorder or feeding troubles? This chapter serves as a useful reference to identify and troubleshoot these and other challenges. In fact, if you are concerned that your child may have an underlying physical or mental health concern underlying his picky eating, we suggest you start the Picky Eater Project by reviewing this chapter first.
What You Can Expect

This book is very much intended to be an interactive guide rather than a book you sit down with, read in one sitting, and then put back on the shelf. You certainly will get the most out of the experience—and see the greatest payoff—if you practice the tools and techniques with your own kids and then reflect on the journey. To help you do this, we recommend a similar process for tackling each week.

1. Choose a goal or two for the week. See how this stacks up with your overall vision for what you hope to accomplish over the 6 weeks.
2. Pick two to three specific actions to take that week to meet the goal.
3. Come up with a plan to make those actions happen.
4. Follow through on the plan.
5. Make changes to the plan to make it work better.
6. Check in on your goals.

To help bring your Picky Eater Project to life, at the end of each week we will prompt you to consider the 6 steps outlined above in addition to suggesting activities and exercises for each week. You will also come across several features such as What’s Your Story? and Try It Out games and experiments with prompts and tips to try the tactics at home and reflect on your experiences.

By the end, you will see how your family life has evolved over the 6 weeks of this Picky Eater Project. Mealtime food battles will be ancient history.

Let’s get started!
No more power struggle. No more mealtime battles.

**Mission**
Create more harmonious mealtimes.

**Strategy**
Practice 10 rules of “picky-free parenting.”

**Measurement**
Number of pleasant mealtimes this week.
Meet Marlo, Corey, Brooke, and Hunter.
Marlo and Corey reached out to us after another frustrating night/week/month of wanting their kids to eat healthier but not feeling like they had the tools they needed to make it happen and still maintain family harmony. They graciously agreed to let us share their experiences to serve as an example of how one family put the Picky Eater Project into action. As you follow along their journey, you will witness firsthand their successes as well as their challenges.

the parents

Marlo is a nurse in a cardiac “cath lab.” She loves to exercise and host get-togethers with family and friends. She is a self-described “people pleaser.” She would really like to see her kids eat a greater variety of healthy foods, especially fish because she loves it and would like to make it for the family. Although she would like the kids to eat healthier, she’d rather they eat something (even if it’s not very healthy or adventurous) than go to bed hungry because they are highly active and need the energy and calories to grow. Meal battles are not something she would prefer to fight about it. For this reason, she is happy to make 2 or more dinners to be sure all have something they will eat.

- Marlo’s all-time favorite foods: sushi and pizza
- Marlo’s favorite vegetables: artichokes and edamame
- Marlo’s least favorite foods: broccoli and dark-meat chicken or lamb
- Marlo’s least favorite vegetables: cilantro and broccoli

Corey is a federal agent and former Marine. He loves to surf and spend time with his kids. His goal is that the whole family eats one meal each night that everyone is willing to try (not the same acceptable meals day in and day out). It doesn’t matter if the family meal is healthy (though he’d prefer that it be); he would just like everyone to agree on something.

- Corey’s all-time favorite food: barbecue chicken thighs
- Corey’s favorite vegetable: baked beans (“Does that count?”) (Technically, beans are a vegetable and a protein, so we say YES, though baked beans typically have a considerable amount of added salt and sugar.)
- Corey’s least favorite food: will eat anything
- Corey’s least favorite vegetable: likes them all
MEET THE FAMILY

the kids

Brooke is 10 years old and in sixth grade. She loves swimming and spending time with her friends. Her goal is to flip a pancake without having it smear all over the pan and be trusted to use not just the microwave but also the oven, stove, and toaster. She is kind of excited to start the Picky Eater Project but also a little concerned. What exactly is it she’s going to have to eat?

- **Brooke’s all-time favorite foods:**
  turkey, stuffing, and cranberries

- **Brooke’s favorite vegetables:**
  broccoflower (never tried it but really wants to!) and celery

- **Brooke’s least favorite food:**
  fish BUT she volunteers that she is open to eating salmon with “good sauce,” which “tastes like a piece of candy”

- **Brooke’s least favorite vegetable:**
  cauliflower (“It looks weird, but actually I might try to eat it.”)

Hunter is 7 years old and in third grade. He loves baseball, swimming, math, and anything that involves being outside or requiring a lot of energy. His goal is to eat more artichokes. Despite being a picky eater, after hesitantly trying artichokes at a friend’s house before the Picky Eater Project started, he learned he loves them and wants to eat them all the time.

- **Hunter’s all-time favorite foods:**
  artichokes and pizza

- **Hunter’s favorite vegetable:**
  artichokes

- **Hunter’s least favorite food:**
  imitation crab

- **Hunter’s least favorite vegetable:**
  None! He likes every kind of vegetable, though his parents say that is quite surprising since he won’t eat most kinds of vegetables.

At the onset of their Picky Eater Project, we sat down with Marlo, Corey, and their kids, Brooke and Hunter, to better understand their family mealtime routines.
Family Schedule and Routine

Marlo has a very sporadic schedule, including many overnight and weekend calls.

Corey works as a federal agent with erratic but somewhat flexible hours. They co-parent, splitting most of the grocery shopping and meal prep. It turns out, as with many American families, it’s quite a balancing act.

Hunter plays baseball and swims competitively. Brooke also swims competitively. Both kids are very high energy—especially Hunter—and love to be active.

There’s not a lot of time to throw together gourmet meals, not that their kids would eat them anyway. Given Hunter’s and Brooke’s high level of physical activity and the understanding that kids need energy, vitamins, and minerals to grow, Marlo and Corey get anxious when their kids refuse to eat meals and are willing to make them something different just to be sure they eat enough, essentially often making 2 to 3 different meals at every mealtime.

**GOAL:** Their primary goal is to make one dinner for the whole family and additionally have the kids eat more vegetables (carrots are one of their favorites) and fish (they will not eat).

**WHAT'S YOUR STORY**

- How would you describe your family routines?
- How do your children’s ages and activities and your career and priorities affect mealtimes at your house?
- Who is primarily responsible for selecting, purchasing, and preparing food at your house?
Meal Dilemma

Marlo and Corey usually start by offering one meal. But when their kids refuse it (which they do more often than not), they readily offer something else. Marlo and Corey would like their kids to be more adventurous in their eating choices, but do not feel it is worth fighting about or letting the kids “starve” by refusing to cook something else. Both agree that Brooke is the pickier of the two but also the most influential. If she tries something, Hunter will too. If she rejects it, there’s little chance Hunter will go for it, unless he’s trying to win “bonus points” with his parents.

Interestingly, when Brooke learned about the project, she jumped up, pulled an apron out of the kitchen drawer, and exclaimed, “Wait, does this mean I get to learn how to cook!” When Hunter learned of the project, he shared his disdain for Brussel sprouts but then, later, commented that if he helped make them and they looked like they would taste good, he would give them a try.

What’s Your Story?

- What would you consider to be your greatest challenge during mealtimes?
- What parenting styles have helped or hurt as you’ve worked to help your kids eat a wider variety of foods?
- How did your kids respond when you told them you were going to be starting a Picky Eater Project at your house? If you haven’t told them, why not?

Throughout a total of 6 weeks, Marlo, Corey, Brooke, and Hunter will serve as models of the Picky Eater Project in action. While the specific details of this family’s experience will be different than what you experience, the process for undoing picky eating is the same, and we hope that looking on their experience will help your own Picky Eater Project come to life. Whether you have a toddler at her peak of pickiness or are struggling with persistently picky preferences in school-aged and teenaged kids, the Picky Eater Project will help you bring some sanity back to mealtimes.
As we advised to Marlo and Corey in their first week of the project, it is helpful to start with a vision of how you hope your kids’ eating habits will turn out at the end of the day, once they’re on their own (the ultimate test of this approach to raising healthy eaters), as well as what you hope to achieve by the end of the 6 weeks. Think of it kind of like your **family mission statement**, at least when it comes to food. This mealtime mission statement will serve as a compass to help prioritize your decisions and actions and align your everyday activities to the bigger picture.

For example, a mission statement could be as simple as “We will be a family of adventurous eaters.”

Or “My children will grow up to be healthful eaters.”

Or “We will eat healthfully most days.”

Or “No more power struggle. No more mealtime battles.”

**WHAT’S YOUR STORY**

Write down a family mission statement. Post it someplace visible, where all family members can be reminded of it, throughout the 6 weeks of the Picky Eater Project.

Marlo and Corey’s mission? To simply have a single meal at dinner.

What we suggested to Marlo and Corey, and suggest to all parents trying to avoid or reshape picky eating preferences, and realize their family mealtime mission, is to adopt a parenting style that we have coined “picky-free parenting.” It is the middle ground between the hovering, micromanaging tendencies of a stereotypical helicopter parent (an authoritarian parenting approach) and the permissive, anything goes mentality of a stereotypical “free-range parent” (a permissive/hands-off or indulgent parenting
approach). For example, when it comes to mealtimes, a helicopter parent might hover over a picky eater and demand that he eat everything on his plate or no dessert. A free-range parent might not mind if a child has loaded up on unhealthy foods—after all, that’s better than starving. On the other hand, a picky-free parent will make sure a healthy, balanced meal is available most of the time and leave it to the child to choose what and how much of it to eat.

A picky-free style of parenting has also been referred to as “authoritative” or “responsive parenting.” We prefer to use responsive parenting so as to avoid confusion between authoritarian and authoritative parenting. The idea is that parents set the stage for a child to feel empowered to make a choice and exercise some autonomy. The parents create structure and guidelines for their children but leave room for flexibility and negotiation. Children experience certain freedoms within well-described rules. In other words, the parent has been very strategic and thoughtful in setting the stage, so the child is highly likely to make a good choice.

What is your parenting style? Take the parent feeding quizzes (see Tables 1.1–1.4 on pages 9–11) to find out.

**Are You a Picky-Free Parent? Child Feeding Questionnaire**

Researchers developed the Child Feeding Questionnaire to better understand parents’ strategies and ideas about child feeding. The questions on the next pages are excerpted from the full questionnaire and can help you determine if you tend to take a more free-range (permissive/indulgent), picky-free (authoritative/responsive), or helicopter (authoritarian) parenting approach to mealtimes.

Taking a picky-free approach to mealtimes, in which children are encouraged to eat healthy but also given some choices, is associated with improved nutrition and health outcomes. This is true even for picky eaters, whose parents may feel more invested in their nutritional choices and may have a tendency to practice a more authoritarian parenting style, which often turns out to be counterproductive. What is your parenting style? Take the parent feeding quizzes (Tables 1.1–1.4) to find out.
Table 1.1. Perceived Feeding Responsibility
Using the scale below, please circle one number for each question that best corresponds with your answer. Please answer with your child whose eating preferences you are most concerned about in mind.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. When your child is at home, how often are you responsible for feeding your child?</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Seldom</th>
<th>Half of Time</th>
<th>Most of Time</th>
<th>Always</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2. How often are you responsible for deciding what your child’s portion sizes are?</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Seldom</th>
<th>Half of Time</th>
<th>Most of Time</th>
<th>Always</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3. How often are you responsible for deciding if your child has eaten the right kinds of foods?</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Seldom</th>
<th>Half of Time</th>
<th>Most of Time</th>
<th>Always</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1.2. Restriction
Using the scale below, please circle one number for each question that best corresponds with your answer. Please answer with your child whose eating preferences you are most concerned about in mind.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4. How concerned are you about your child eating too much when you are not around him/her?</th>
<th>Unconcerned</th>
<th>Slightly Unconcerned</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Slightly Concerned</th>
<th>Concerned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>5. How concerned are you about your child having to diet to maintain a desirable weight?</th>
<th>Unconcerned</th>
<th>Slightly Unconcerned</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Slightly Concerned</th>
<th>Concerned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>6. How concerned are you about your child becoming overweight?</th>
<th>Unconcerned</th>
<th>Slightly Unconcerned</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Slightly Concerned</th>
<th>Concerned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1.3. Pressure to Eat
Using the scale below, please circle one number for each question that best corresponds with your answer. Please answer with your child whose eating preferences you are most concerned about in mind.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Slightly Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Slightly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7. I have to be sure my child does not eat too many sweets (eg, candy, ice cream, cake, pastries).</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. I have to be sure my child does not eat too many high-fat foods.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. I have to be sure my child does not eat too many of his/her favorite foods.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. I intentionally keep some foods out of my child’s reach.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. I offer sweets (eg, candy, ice cream, cake, pastries) to my child as a reward for good behavior.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. I offer sweets (eg, candy, ice cream, cake, pastries) to my child as a reward for good behavior.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. I offer my child his/her favorite foods in exchange for good behavior.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. If I did not guide or regulate my child’s eating, he/she would eat too many junk foods.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. My child should always eat all the food on his/her plate.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. I have to be especially careful to make sure my child eats enough.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. If my child says, “I’m not hungry,” I try to get him/her to eat anyway.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. If I did not guide or regulate my child’s eating, he/she would eat much less than he/she should.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1.4. Monitoring
Using the scale below, please circle one number for each question that best corresponds with your answer. Please answer with your child whose eating preferences you are most concerned about in mind.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Mostly</th>
<th>Always</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>19. How much do you keep track of the sweets (e.g., candy, ice cream, cake, pastries) your child eats?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. How much do you keep track of the snack foods (e.g., potato chips like Doritos, cheese puffs) your child eats?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. How much do you keep track of the high-fat foods your child eats?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Scoring
For each table, add your score.

Table 1.1. Perceived Feeding Responsibility
This measures the extent to which a parent feels a greater responsibility (versus a spouse or partner) for a child’s nutritional intake, including portion sizes and types of foods eaten. Total possible points: 15.

Table 1.2. Restriction
This measures a parent’s self-reported attempts to control a child’s nutritional intake through restricting access to unwanted foods, including the types and amounts of those foods. Total possible points: 15.

Table 1.3. Pressure to Eat
These questions examine a parent’s self-reported attempts to control a child’s food intake, including the types and amounts of foods eaten. Total possible points: 60.

Table 1.4. Monitoring
This describes the extent to which a parent keeps track of a child’s consumption of junk foods. Total possible points: 15.
In general, picky-free (responsive) parents tend to score high on perceived responsibility and monitoring and low on restriction and pressure to eat. On the other hand, helicopter (authoritarian) parents tend to score high on both restriction and pressure to eat, while free-range (permissive/indulgent) parents score high on restriction and low on monitoring.

So How Do You Put This Into Action?
Even if your natural tendency isn’t along the lines of picky-free parenting, you can make small changes to your approach that will lead your family toward healthier, happier mealtimes. You’ve already created your family mission; now, we suggest creating your own family “rules” that the whole family will follow. Involve your kids in the process and post the rules on the refrigerator or in a common area where all members of the family can be reminded of them. The more involved your children are in creating the family rules, the more likely they will be to follow them. If everyone agrees to follow the ground rules, it will be easy to come back and reinforce them.
10 Rules of Picky-Free Parenting

These are our suggested 10 rules of picky-free parenting. You may find you want to start with adopting some or all of them. Feel free to reword, restate, or elaborate on them to make them fit for your own family.

1. As parents, we will be good role models. We will only ask the kids to eat foods that we are willing to eat ourselves.

2. As parents, we will decide what foods are offered, when, and where. As kids, we will decide, of the food that is offered, what we will eat and how much.

3. We will value the process of learning to be more adventurous eaters. We will be willing to try new foods, even if it is just a tiny bite.

4. We do not have to clean our plates. We will listen to our bodies and let hunger be our guide.

5. No food rewards will be offered. In other words, we kids do not have to “eat our vegetables” to get dessert on those days when dessert is available. We will not reward good behavior with sweets and “treats.”

6. Mealtimes equal family time. As often as we can, we will shop, cook, and eat together.

7. We are one family, and we will eat one meal. We will not make separate meals. But we will be sure to include at least one thing each family member likes at most meals.

8. We will learn together about food, nutrition, farming, and cooking.

9. We will have fun, play, and experiment with new foods.

10. We will be consistent in following these rules, but not rigid.

Table 1.5 offers some examples of picky-free parenting in practice based on a child’s developmental stage.
### Table 1.5. Picky-Free Parenting in Practice by Ages and Stages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age/Stage</th>
<th>Picky-Free Parenting Tips</th>
<th>Recipe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pregnancy</td>
<td>Make a habit of eating at least one unusual, new, or bitter food a few times per week. The flavors pass into the amniotic fluid and may help your baby be more willing to eat these foods down the road. Plus, the more you increase exposure to new foods, the more you will come to like them, and this will serve as modeling for your child down the road.</td>
<td>Cuban Black Bean Soup (For recipe, see page 21.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infancy</td>
<td>As a breastfeeding mom, eat a wide variety of unusual, new, or bitter foods a few (or more) times per week to help increase your baby’s exposure to those foods through breast milk.</td>
<td>Baba Ghanoush (See page 23.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Adventurous solids**
When introducing solids, when your infant is about 6 months old, introduce one new food at a time, with a special focus on bitter vegetables, a little bit of spice, and single-ingredient, adventurous foods.

**Texture tasting**
While you may start with purees, remember to advance texture over time to help a baby be willing to enjoy many different textures of foods. Once all the ingredients of a recipe have been introduced, it is fine to prepare them together. Infants have immature taste buds, which make them open to eating just about anything their first year or so of eating solid foods. As you advance textures, be sure the food is soft and small enough to prevent choking. Ultimately, by the time a child is 1 year old, she should be enjoying a wide variety of foods of varying smells, textures, and tastes—just like the rest of the family!
Table 1.5 (cont)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age/Stage</th>
<th>Picky-Free Parenting Tips</th>
<th>Recipe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Toddler</td>
<td>Age 2 is about when picky preferences (aka neophobia) kick in. Go with the flow while making it a habit to eat family meals together, and resist the temptations to force a child to eat or to cater to picky preferences or engage in mealtime battles. Instead, make sure at least one food your child likes is at each meal, and continue to provide a balanced meal, whether the child eats it or not.</td>
<td>Chicken Fingers (See page 25.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preschool</td>
<td>Engage your preschooler in the process of choosing and preparing foods. Kids are more likely to eat what they grow, choose, or prepare.</td>
<td>Tomato Salad With Basil and Feta Cheese (See page 26.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>Help your kids learn where their food comes from by growing a miniature garden. Plant easy-to-grow foods that the child might otherwise be resistant to try (eg, spinach, sweet peppers).</td>
<td>Mixed-up Eggs and Spinach (See page 27.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teen</td>
<td>Make a commitment to eat family meals together at least 2–3 times per week. This not only makes it more likely a teen will eat a balanced meal but also helps strengthen family relationships and decrease the likelihood of risk-taking behaviors. Require a teen to occasionally help choose and prepare meals to help him develop cooking skills. Require that the meal contain a protein, grain, fruit, and vegetable but otherwise avoid the urge to micromanage too much what the teen chooses.</td>
<td>Skillet Lasagna (See page 29.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These rules will help support creating more harmonious, healthful mealtimes for your family. However, the mere existence of the rules will not be enough to change habits and behaviors. Box 1.1 shows how consistency and use of simple routines can help boost your kids’ health. The rest of this book will help you translate these rules into normal family routines that will lead to healthier and happier mealtimes.
Every parent wants to raise healthy, happy, stable kids. While there are certainly many ways to go about achieving this goal, implementing regular family routines has been shown, time and again, to help set the stage for raising successful kids. Mealtime, bedtime and screen time routines are associated with better nutrition, decreased risk of childhood obesity, improved child sleep (and parental sanity!), decreased risk-taking behaviors in teens, and fewer complications of chronic diseases such as asthma.

**The Essential Components to Any Routine**

The American Academy of Pediatrics published a report on actions families can take to help optimize child health. Establishing a successful routine was one of them, which the authors suggest is about more than enforcing a set dinner time or bedtime. The report suggests that for best results, a successful routine needs to include:

- A plan and scheduled time
- Elimination of distractions
- Direct communication of parental expectations

**A Mealtime Example.** A mealtime routine might include your family meal at 6:30 p.m. on weekdays, where your whole family sits together at the kitchen table. Television, phones and tablets are not allowed. At this time, each member of your family shares the best and worst parts of their days, and each one takes at least 20 minutes to eat together and reconnect with each other. No one is required to clean their plate, but all must remain at the table until they ask to be excused.

**A Bedtime Example.** A successful bedtime routine for your 5-year-old may start at 7 p.m. each night. It begins with a bath, followed by putting on pajamas and spending 15 minutes reading with a parent in a quiet room, with “screens” off and out of reach. You may then sing a short song and say “good night” to the child, remind the child that he or she is expected to go to sleep and not get out of bed until the morning comes, tuck the child into bed, give him or her a kiss on the forehead, and turn on the night-light before leaving the room.
**Box 1.1 (cont)**

**A Screen Time Example.** Many kids spend countless hours in front of screens playing video games, watching TV and staring at a computer or smartphone. In fact, many have established a habit of spending their afternoons with a screen rather than playing outside with their friends. Break this routine and create a new one by implementing a new screen-time rule. Plan ahead by choosing a set time of day in which screens are allowed, such as from 3:30-4:30 p.m. Make clear your expectation that they will not be eating or using multiple screens at one time during this hour. Share that outside of this one hour, you will not allow them to look at any kind of screen, and that you expect them to be doing something else—such as playing with their friends outside, doing homework or reading. Enforce this rule. (Author’s note: The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that children younger than 18 months to 2 years avoid screen time.)

**Getting Started**

Begin by simply taking inventory of your current routines. What would you like to see done differently? Choose just one routine, modify it and experiment to see how your family’s daily experience changes. Once you’ve found a system that works, engage other influencers in your child’s life. For example, does your child spend a significant amount of time with other caretakers? Aim to understand the routines your child has with them, and see if you can both adopt some of the same routines to help ease transitions.

Implementing these types of routines on a daily basis may seem overwhelming for busy families that struggle to simply get through the day, or that are rushing to shuttle kids from one practice to the next, with everyone on a different schedule. Yet, establishing routines helps to provide stability and a calm environment for kids, building their resilience and grit to withstand the chaos and pressures they may be feeling from the outside world.

Chapter 1
Week 1: Picky-Free Parenting

YOUR PICKY EATER PROJECT—WEEK 1

Picky-Free Parenting

Project To-dos Checklist

☐ Draft a Family Mealtime Mission Statement.
☐ As a family, adopt your own family mealtime rules (see examples in 10 Rules of Picky-Free Parenting section on page 13).
☐ Complete the Child Feeding Questionnaire (see Tables 1.1–1.4 on pages 9–11).
☐ Setting out a specific vision helps achieve your mission. Start by answering the following questions: What will success look like? In 6 weeks, 6 months, 6 years, 16 years?

Resources

Week 1 Recipes
Cuban Black Bean Soup

Rich in flavor and soft in texture, black beans, often called “black turtle beans,” are perfect for soup. Black bean soup takes well to the classic Latin American flavors of cumin, chili, cilantro, and lime—add more or less of any of these, depending on what you like.

**Kitchen Gear**
- Peeler
- Can opener
- Measuring spoons
- Sharp knife
- Cutting board
- Colander or strainer
- Measuring cup
- Large heavy-bottomed pot
- Wooden spoon or heatproof spatula
- Pot holders

**Ingredients**
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 large onions, peeled and chopped
- 2 carrots, scrubbed or peeled, and chopped
- 2 celery stalks, chopped
- 4 garlic cloves, peeled, and minced or chopped
- 1 teaspoon ground cumin
- 1 teaspoon chili powder
- 1½ teaspoons dried oregano
- 1 teaspoon cayenne pepper (if you like it spicy)
- 3 (15-ounce) cans black beans, drained and rinsed
- 8 cups low-sodium chicken or vegetable broth
- 2 tablespoons fresh lime juice
- ½ cup chopped fresh cilantro leaves, for garnish
- ½ cup plain yogurt, for garnish

**Instructions**
1. Put the pot on the stove and turn the heat to medium. When it is hot, carefully add the oil.
2. Add the onions, carrots, celery, garlic, and spices and cook until tender, 10 to 15 minutes.
3. Add the beans and broth, raise the heat to high, and bring to a boil. Lower the heat to medium and cook partially covered for 2 hours, stirring frequently. (If at any point the soup seems too thick and is starting to look like mud, add 1 to 2 cups more broth.)
4. Just before serving, stir in the lime juice. Serve right away garnished with the cilantro and yogurt or cover and refrigerate up to 3 days.
Cuban Black Bean Soup (cont)

**Kids in the Kitchen**
- Teach your child how to measure ingredients and spices.
- Have your child rinse the beans using a colander or strainer.
- Your child can squeeze the lime for fresh lime juice.

**Personalize It**
- Instead of lime juice, use lemon juice.
- Add 1 (16-ounce) can diced tomatoes.
- Swap in fresh basil leaves for the cilantro.
Baba Ghanoush

Spread this herby, lemony dip on a sandwich; dollop it onto a salad; or scoop it up with raw vegetables, whole-grain crackers, or pita.

**Kitchen Gear**
- Sharp knife
- Cutting board
- Measuring spoons
- Rimmed baking sheet
- Aluminum foil
- 2 forks
- Pot holder
- Colander
- Food processor
- Serving bowl

**Ingredients**
- 2 medium-sized eggplants
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 3 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
- 2 garlic cloves, peeled and minced
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh mint leaves or 1 teaspoon dried
- ½ teaspoon salt

**Instructions**
1. Position the top oven rack about 10 inches above the heating element and set the oven to broil. Cover the baking sheet with aluminum foil.
2. Use a fork to prick each eggplant all over. Place them on the baking sheet and put the sheet in the oven. After 20 minutes, carefully take the baking sheet out of the oven and use 2 forks to turn each eggplant over. Place the baking sheet back in the oven, and broil the eggplants until they are completely collapsed and browned, about 25 additional minutes.
3. Place the eggplants in the colander and set aside to cool for 10 minutes. After they cool, use the 2 forks to turn each eggplant over. Allow them to drain, open side down, until they are cool enough to touch, about 15 minutes.
4. Pull the flesh from the skin. This is most easily accomplished with a fork and clean fingers, and will involve some combination of peeling the skin and scraping the flesh; be sure to get at all the nicely browned stuff right by the skin. Throw away the skin.
5. Put the eggplant flesh in the food processor fitted with the steel blade. Add the remaining ingredients and process until smooth, about 1 minute.
6. Scrape the dip into the bowl.
7. Serve right away or cover and refrigerate up to 2 days.
Baba Ghanoush \textit{(cont)}

**Kids in the Kitchen**
- Let your child poke holes in the eggplant using a fork.
- Your child can squeeze the lemon for fresh lemon juice.
- Show your child how to separate the eggplant flesh from the skin.
- Let your child press the buttons on the food processor.
- Ask your child to taste the Baba Ghanoush: Does it need anything to boost the flavor? Does it need more lemon juice? More mint? A pinch of salt? If so, add it and, then, taste again.

**Personalize It**
- Instead of fresh mint, use fresh basil.
- Add 2 tablespoons tahini.
Chicken Fingers

Oven-fried chicken is way better than pan-fried. It tastes better, is better for you, and doesn’t smoke up the kitchen!

### Kitchen Gear
- Measuring spoons
- Measuring cup
- Sharp knife
- Cutting board
- Paper towel
- Mixing spoon or whisk
- Baking sheet
- Large plate
- Large bowl
- Spatula or tongs

### Ingredients
- 2 tablespoons olive or canola oil
- 1 cup fine bread crumbs or panko
- ½ cup whole-wheat flour
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- ½ teaspoon black pepper
- ¼ teaspoon cayenne pepper
- 2 large eggs, beaten
- 1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
- 1 teaspoon dried thyme
- 6 skinless chicken thighs, cut into thick strips
- 1 lemon, cut into quarters

### Instructions
1. Turn the oven on and set it to 400 degrees Fahrenheit.
2. Pour the oil on the baking sheet and, using your clean hands or a paper towel, spread it around.
3. Place the bread crumbs, flour, salt, pepper, and cayenne on a large plate. Mix well.
4. Place the eggs, mustard, and thyme into the bowl and mix well. Add the chicken pieces and mix until they are well coated with the egg mixture.
5. Remove the chicken pieces one at a time from the egg mixture and let any extra egg mixture drip off.
6. Dip the chicken pieces one at a time in the bread crumb mixture, rolling them and pressing down to coat each side.
7. Shake off any extra coating; then put the chicken pieces on the baking sheet.
8. Transfer the baking sheet to the oven and bake for 15 minutes. Using a spatula or tongs, turn the chicken pieces over and bake until golden brown, 15 to 20 more minutes. Serve right away with a quarter of a lemon on each plate.
Chapter 1
Week 1: Picky-Free Parenting

Tomato Salad With Basil and Feta Cheese

Hands-on time: 15 minutes
Total time: 10 minutes
Makes: 4 servings

Nothing says summer like a sun-warmed, fresh tomato you grew yourself. Buy a little pot of basil and leave it on your windowsill, or, better yet, if you have a garden, plant it.

### Ingredients
- 4 large red tomatoes
- ½ cup crumbled feta cheese
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh basil leaves
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- ¼ teaspoon salt

### Kitchen Gear
- Sharp knife
- Serrated knife
- Cutting board
- Measuring cup
- Measuring spoons
- Mixing bowl

### Instructions
1. Use the sharp knife to remove the core from the tomatoes. Use the serrated knife to cut it into 1-inch cubes.
2. Combine the tomatoes, feta, and basil in a bowl.
3. Drizzle with the olive oil and sprinkle with the salt.
4. Serve right away or cover and refrigerate up to overnight.

### Personalize It
- Instead of feta, use diced mozzarella, cheddar, or grated Parmesan cheese.
- Add ½ teaspoon curry powder.
- Swap in fresh peaches or nectarines, pitted and diced, for 2 of the tomatoes.
- Add 1 to 2 cups white beans or chickpeas.

### Kids in the Kitchen
- Count the tomatoes.
- Let your child mix everything together.
- Ask your child to taste the salad: Does it need anything to boost the flavor? Does it need more basil? A pinch of salt? If so, add it and, then, taste again.
**Mixed-up Eggs and Spinach**

**Kitchen Gear**
- Measuring cup
- Sharp knife
- Cutting board
- Measuring spoons
- Medium-sized bowl
- Fork or whisk
- Skillet
- Heatproof spatula
- 2 plates

**Ingredients**
- 4 large eggs
- 1 cup flat-leaf spinach, rinsed well and finely chopped
- 2 tablespoons chopped scallion greens and whites
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 1 tablespoon olive oil

**Hands-on time:** 20 minutes  
**Total time:** 20 minutes  
**Makes:** 2 servings

**Instructions**
1. Crack the eggs into the bowl and mix well.
2. Add the spinach, scallions, and salt and mix again. (The mixture will look very spinachy and not very eggy.)
3. Place the skillet on the stove and turn the heat to medium. When the skillet is hot, carefully add the oil.
4. Add the egg mixture and let it cook for 1 to 2 minutes. Start carefully flipping portions of the eggs, so that you do not fully scramble the eggs but rather gently toss them.
5. When fully cooked (no more runny-looking egg), divide the eggs between the 2 plates. Serve right away.
Mixed-up Eggs and Spinach (cont)

Personalize It
Add other vegetables to your eggs, such as
- Chopped peppers
- Chopped onions
- Chopped broccoli

Kids in the Kitchen
- Have your child practice whisking the eggs with a whisk or fork.
- Let your child stir and flip the egg mixture while in the skillet.
- Ask your child to taste the eggs: Do they need anything to boost the flavor? Do they need a pinch of salt? If so, add it and, then, taste again.
## Skillet Lasagna

Everybody loves lasagna, and our fuss-free recipe makes it easy: the pasta and sauce layer beautifully without a lot of effort on your part. Just make sure to keep the heat low so the noodles cook through without the bottom burning. You can make the sauce ahead of time. Simply reheat it and proceed with the recipe.

### Kitchen Gear
- Measuring spoons
- Sharp knife
- Cutting board
- Measuring cup
- Can opener
- Box grater
- Large (10-inch) skillet with lid
- Heatproof spatula

### Ingredients
- 1 tablespoon olive oil or vegetable oil
- 1 large onion, chopped
- 1 garlic clove, peeled and minced
- 2 zucchini, ends trimmed, diced
- 1 teaspoon dried basil or oregano
- 1 (28-ounce) can diced tomatoes, including liquid
- 1½ cups water
- 2 cups fresh flat-leaf spinach leaves, coarsely chopped
- 8 no-boil lasagna noodles, broken in half
- 1 cup ricotta cheese
- 1 cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese
- 1 cup shredded mozzarella or Monterey Jack cheese
- ½ cup chopped fresh basil leaves
Skillet Lasagna (cont)

Instructions
1. To make the sauce, place the skillet on the stove and turn the heat to medium-low. When the skillet is hot, carefully add the oil. Add the onion and garlic and cook, stirring frequently, until tender, about 10 to 15 minutes.

2. Add the zucchini and basil or oregano and cook covered until the zucchini is just golden and tender, about 10 to 15 minutes.

3. Add the tomatoes and water and stir well. Turn the heat down to low and cook covered for 10 minutes. Remove the lid and cook an additional 10 minutes.

4. Turn the heat off. Add the spinach and stir until the spinach is wilted.

5. Carefully slip 4 noodle pieces into the skillet, using their edges to slide them under the bottom of the sauce, and using the spatula, push them down below the surface. Layer on another 4 noodle pieces and then another 4 and push them all below the surface. Add the last 4 noodle pieces and spoon a little bit of the tomato mixture on top.

6. Add the ricotta 1 tablespoon at a time, dotting the top with dollops. Sprinkle on the mozzarella or Monterey Jack, and then Parmesan cheese.

7. Reheat the skillet over low heat, cover, and continue cooking until the cheeses melt and the noodles are tender when you poke them with the tip of a knife, about 20 minutes. Sprinkle with the basil leaves. Set aside 10 minutes.

8. Serve right away or cover and refrigerate up to 2 days.

Kids in the Kitchen
- Show your child how to measure and chop ingredients, herbs, and spices.
- Have your child use a can opener to open the can of tomatoes—keep an eye out for sharp edges!
- Have your child break the lasagna noodles.
- Have your child add dollops of ricotta and sprinkle Parmesan, and mozzarella or Monterey Jack cheese.

Personalize It
- Eliminate the zucchini.
- Substitute 2 cups mushrooms for the zucchini.
- Substitute baby kale for the spinach.
- Instead of mozzarella cheese, use fontina.
CHAPTER 2

Week 2

A Kitchen Revolution

“A choice architect has the responsibility for organizing the context in which people make decisions.”

**Mission**
Create an environment that supports more adventurous eating.

**Strategy**
Transform the kitchen—what is available, where, when, and how.

**Measurement**
How many times kids try a new food of their choice with no pressure.
Rows of ramen noodles, cheese crackers, chips, granola bars, canned soup, brownie mix, and a variety of other packaged foods lined the pantry shelves. Tucked away in a corner were pistachios, seaweed snacks, water, and a few other whole-grain snacks. The refrigerator included last night’s leftovers, some vegetables, milk, juice, and some fruit hidden away in the lower drawers. The freezer was stocked with frozen chicken nuggets, ice cream bars, and a good variety of frozen vegetables and meats. As we went through the pantry and refrigerator, Marlo reflected: “I wish we could all eat better together. They don’t like the food that I like. I don’t like the food that they like. So we end up eating a bunch of different meals when we sit together at night.”

Our advice was simple: think about the foods you want your family to eat, get rid of everything else, and stock your pantry and refrigerator with those foods. Easy to say, but how exactly do you do it? And what will be the repercussions when some of the kids’ favorite foods are gone?

Our strategy for week 2 is to help kids be more interested in trying new foods by making it really, really easy to choose to eat them. We do that through a refrigerator, pantry, and countertop makeover. The idea is that the healthy foods become highly accessible and therefore easy to choose and the unhealthy foods become hard to find and easy to forget about.

Marlo took our advice to clean out the refrigerator, pantry, and countertop to heart, although it wasn’t easy. She dumped the highly processed foods; bought healthier snack packs, such as unsalted nuts; and filled the refrigerator with vegetables and fruits, which she placed at the kids’ eye levels. Not-so-healthy foods she or other family members couldn’t part with she tucked away in a hard-to-find corner of the pantry, refrigerator, or freezer. She said nothing else about it, and while the kids didn’t really seem to notice, they also proceeded to eat the food that was most available to them, including more fruits and vegetables. Marlo made her kitchen revolution pay off in a big way for her school-aged kids. You can, too. Check out our tips by age and stage in Table 2.1 for more advice on how to make this work for your family.
WHAT'S YOUR STORY

- Take a quick look in your own pantry and refrigerator. What foods are front and center? Are they generally healthy or not so much?
- Ask yourself: If your kids all of a sudden decided they wanted to eat 5 servings of fruits and vegetables today, would you have enough of these foods in your house for them to do that?
- What do you think will happen if you completely reorganize your refrigerator and pantry? How will your kids respond?

Table 2.1. How to Make Your Kitchen Revolution Work by Age and Stage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age/Stage</th>
<th>Kitchen Revolution Tips</th>
<th>Recipe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pregnancy</td>
<td>Buy a new food this week that you’ve never tried before. Whether it is a strange new vegetable (ever tried jicama or turnips?) or a new type of pepper or spice, even though as a rule you may not like spicy food. Store it front and center in your refrigerator, in the pantry, or on the countertop, and seek out a recipe to use it in sometime this week. Just like the bitterness of coffee and tea is learned, so is liking previously rejected foods. Remember, it can take up to 20 times of trying it before you have retrained your taste buds.</td>
<td>Spicy Turkey Chili (For recipe, see page 54.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infancy</td>
<td>(Most) babies love to try new foods! Make a commitment to buy a new food that your baby has never tried—or that older kids refuse to eat (eg, a green vegetable)—and incorporate it into a homemade baby puree. Ask your older kids if they would like to give this experiment a try too!</td>
<td>Sweet Potato Spinach Baby Puree (See page 56.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toddler</td>
<td>Now that you have an abundance of healthy foods stocked in your kitchen, it’s a great time to encourage your toddler to explore the different tastes. Toddlers are especially open to trying foods put together in fun and creative ways and any food that involves dip. Try veggie sticks in a plastic baggie decorated with stickers or a fun arrangement of colorful foods.</td>
<td>Parmesan Yogurt Dip With Carrots or Layered Yogurt Parfait (See pages 53 and 59.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 2.1 (cont)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age/Stage</th>
<th>Kitchen Revolution Tips</th>
<th>Recipe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preschool</td>
<td>Preschoolers love when they get to help choose and make foods. Let them pick what vegetable to have with dinner, take them along when you go grocery shopping, and make it a family project to plant a few seeds (preschoolers generally love to eat what they grow). Make sure you (and other adults in the house) have a healthy and positive attitude toward vegetables and fruits. Also, strategize with the parents of your child’s closest friends—does your son not eat a vegetable that his best friend loves? Have his best friend’s mom or dad offer it up at their next playdate. With time, you might find that food on your child’s list of favorites.</td>
<td>Roasted Vegetables (See page 57.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>Undoing picky eating can be hard for school-aged children because they already have somewhat established eating preferences. If you give the option between a salty processed snack and a fruit or vegetable, most are going to choose the salty snack every time. So don't give them that choice. Instead, offer a choice between 2 healthy options, or simply place a healthy snack on the table and let them decide whether or not to try it, but make sure that the unhealthy snack is not available as an alternative option. At mealtimes, make small changes to already preferred meals to make them a little bit healthier. For example, the chicken/turkey/pork/lamb burgers recipe in this chapter offers a healthy alternative to a standard hamburger.</td>
<td>Every Kind of Burger (Well, Almost) (See page 60.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teen</td>
<td>Your kitchen redesign will likely have the greatest effect for your teens. Teens are growing rapidly and need energy and calories to fuel that growth. That means they'll eat pretty much whatever is available. After you dump the junk food, when they are at home your teens will have no option but to eat the healthy food you’ve stocked up. Or better yet, get the teens in the kitchen to try it out for themselves.</td>
<td>Energy Bars (See page 62.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Kitchen Revolution Guidelines

First: The Fridge

Nudge your family toward healthier choices by storing the healthy foods front and center and the less healthy foods, or the preferred foods you wish your child would eat less of, in harder-to-see places. Here’s how.

1. **Clean it out.** It is best to get on a schedule and do this weekly to minimize food spoilage and keep your refrigerator clutter-free. Remove everything from the refrigerator, give the shelves a good cleaning, and trash any expired foods or items that no one is likely to ever eat.

2. **Take inventory.** Make a list of food you need to purchase to be able to prepare your planned meals for the week. Planned meals are generally healthier with less food wasted.

3. **Now, strategically restock.**
   - **Not-so-close.** Put the not-so-healthy items in the back of the refrigerator. This way, you and your family will have to work a little bit to find and eat them. That one extra step will go a long way in those foods being eaten less frequently.
   - **Front and center.** Put the fruits and vegetables on the main shelves in the refrigerator. We have all had healthy produce go bad because we forgot about it in a fruit and vegetable drawer. If you put them in a location that can’t be missed, you and the family will be more likely to eat them.
   - **Prepare.** If you prep the healthy stuff, it is more likely to be eaten. Thoroughly wash fruits and vegetables and cut them into snack-sized pieces. Put them in clear containers so they won’t be missed.
   - **No waste.** Place leftovers and food that needs to be eaten soon in an easy-to-find location. Plan to use leftovers for lunches and snacks. For example, use leftover chicken in salads and sandwiches instead of prepackaged and not-so-healthy (due to high sodium and nitrites) deli meat.
Milk, water, iced tea (oh, my!). Minimize space for unhealthy drinks. Try to include only fat-free milk, water, iced tea (for the adults; caffeinated drinks are generally not recommended for kids), or other beverages that are low in calories in the refrigerator. If the less healthy beverages like sodas and juice boxes are a normal part of your family’s day and you aren’t ready to avoid them, try to decrease consumption by keeping only single-serving amounts in the refrigerator for now. In the long run, if you can ditch the sugary drinks, the whole family will benefit tremendously.

Next: The Pantry
The food available in your pantry can make or break your Picky Eater Project. You will eat much healthier by default when you stock your pantry in a way that makes eating a variety of healthy foods easy. Here’s how.

1. **Empty it out.** Start your pantry makeover by completely emptying it out. This will not only help you identify the types of food that you have accumulated but also set the stage for getting rid of unhealthy foods and clutter from the pantry. This is also a great time to remodel or reorganize your pantry to make it more attractive and user-friendly.

2. **Pitch and toss.** Throw away all outdated or expired food and packaged food that contains any variation of sugar as the first or second ingredient or more than 13 grams of added sugar per serving (Table 2.2). Do the same with high-sodium products—does a single serving of chips provide almost half of your child’s recommended sodium level? Toss it. It is OK to hold on to items you can’t toss because you need to use them occasionally (eg, brown or granulated sugar) or foods you just aren’t ready to part with, but when you restock the pantry, store these items in harder-to-see-and-reach places.
### Table 2.2. All the Ways to Say Sugar
Sugar comes in many forms on the ingredient list. These words are all variations of sugar.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agave nectar</th>
<th>Evaporated cane juice</th>
<th>Malt syrup</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brown sugar</td>
<td>Fructose</td>
<td>Maple syrup</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cane crystals</td>
<td>Fruit juice concentrates</td>
<td>Molasses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cane sugar</td>
<td>Glucose</td>
<td>Raw sugar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corn sweetener</td>
<td>High-fructose corn syrup</td>
<td>Sucrose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corn syrup</td>
<td>Honey</td>
<td>Syrup</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crystalline fructose</td>
<td>Invert sugar</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dextrose</td>
<td>Maltose</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 2.3. Characteristics of Healthy Snack Options

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nutrient Qualities</th>
<th>Sample Snacks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is either</td>
<td>• Any fresh, frozen, dried, canned, or baked vegetable or fruit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fruit</td>
<td>• Whole-grain crackers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vegetable</td>
<td>• Almonds, walnuts, cashews, or peanuts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whole grain</td>
<td>• Plain yogurt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fat-free or low-fat milk product</td>
<td>• Canned tuna or salmon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fish</td>
<td>• Low-fat cheese slice or cheese stick</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extra-lean meat or poultry</td>
<td>• Hard-boiled egg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eggs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nuts or seeds</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beans</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The healthiest snacks contain</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 15% of calories from saturated fat and no trans fat</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No more than 13 grams of added sugars per serving</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 210 milligrams of sodium per serving</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3 Restock. Now, restock with the good stuff. Check out Table 2.3 for expert recommendations to help identify snacks and meals for the kids that are generally healthy. Use our Picky Eater Project Pantry Guide (Box 2.1) for specific suggestions on foods to include.

### Box 2.1. The Picky Eater Project Pantry Guide

Stock your pantry with these food items to optimize your family’s health and make sure you have all the essentials on hand when you need them.

**Canned vegetables, beans, and fruits.** These canned products can be just as healthy as their fresh counterparts if you purchase low-sodium variations for the vegetables and rinse with water before cooking. For fruits, choose canned fruit that lists it in its own juice.

**Nuts and seeds.** Have reduced-salt nuts and seeds on hand to add to meals and salads, as well as for snacking. Walnuts, almonds, pine nuts, pistachios, and cashews are excellent additions to any pantry. Try to avoid beer nuts, high-salt mixed nuts packages, and macadamia nuts.

**Pastas and grains.** Make sure to include whole-grain and high-fiber pastas and grains in your pantry. Brown rice, couscous, bulgur, oatmeal, barley, buckwheat, and quinoa are just a few examples of health-boosting grains. Transition from white pasta and flour to the whole-grain versions to boost health.

**Herbs, spices, and oils.** A mix of spices, dried herbs, and oils will help liven your cooking. Spices and dried herbs generally have a shelf life of 1–2 years. Check the flavor and color of spices to see if they are still up to par to meet your cooking needs (old spices won’t be very flavorful, but they also won’t make you sick). Make sure you have plenty of heart-healthy olive oil and canola oil on hand.
Finally: The Countertop

You can decrease kitchen clutter and increase the number of fruits, vegetables, and other healthy foods your family eats by reengineering how you organize, decorate, and use kitchen countertops and the kitchen table.

1. **Clean the clutter.** Decrease your kitchen clutter by cleaning off the countertops and kitchen table and relocating the “stuff” to a file box or by creating an organization system. Likewise, if a variety of small kitchen appliances like a blender, toaster, or coffeemaker or other gadgets have filled your countertops, try to clear some shelf space for them. Do you keep a cookie container, candy bowl, or other highly visible and not-so-healthy snack on your countertops or tables? We suggest you move it out of sight.

2. **Fruit for thought.** Reorganize the counter space in a way that promotes a healthy kitchen. Start with a bowl of fresh fruit. Place it in a highly trafficked area and your family’s fruit consumption will increase immediately. Not so sure? See for yourself with our kitchen traffic experiment (Try It Out: The Kitchen Traffic Experiment).

**TRY IT OUT**

**The Kitchen Traffic Experiment**

**The Hypothesis**
When children frequently see and pass by healthy foods placed strategically in high-traffic areas such as a kitchen island, a table, or an eye-level shelf in the pantry, they will eat more of that healthy food.

**The Experiment**

**Part A.** Place a predetermined number of an easy-to-eat fruit in its normal location in your home. Each night before going to bed, count how much of the fruit has been eaten. Do this for 3 days.

**Part B.** Then for the next 3 days, place the same amount of the same fruit in a high-traffic area. Again, each night before going to bed, count how much of the fruit has been eaten.

Compare the results from parts **A** and **B**. What did you find?
Growing a healthy interest. Get the kids on board to help you plant (or buy) an indoor herb garden. It may be just a few staples, like basil and oregano, or you could be more elaborate (see the Lowdown on Herbs and Spices section below for a quick overview of commonly used [and not so commonly used] herbs and spices). People (especially kids) love to eat what they grow. This small and easy-to-care-for garden will increase healthy food consumption and help liven home-cooked meals.

The Lowdown on Herbs and Spices

When it comes to feeding the family healthy foods that they’ll actually eat, you can’t go wrong with herbs and spices. For starters, herbs are easy to grow in temperate climates (spices are a little more difficult since they tend to originate in specific climates). You can set up a windowsill or backyard garden and grow a wide variety of greens. Kids tend to eat what they grow, which increases the odds they’ll be willing to give the food a chance. Second, herbs bring a blast of flavor to foods, thus increasing the taste without having to load on the calories and salt. Who doesn’t like to eat what tastes good? Finally, herbs and spices are loaded with nutrients, giving your health a boost, too.

You can mix and match herbs and spices to transform healthy, but bland, meals (like grilled chicken breast and steamed vegetables) into a cultural masterpiece. For instance, use the following herb and spice combinations to give a basic meal a distinct and delicious flare:

- **Indian**: garlic + onion + curry powder + cinnamon
- **Asian**: garlic + scallions + sesame + ginger + soy sauce
- **Italian**: garlic + basil + parsley + oregano
- **Middle Eastern**: garlic + onion + mint + cumin + saffron + lemon
- **Mexican**: cumin + onion + oregano + cilantro
So, how well do you know your herbs and spices? In the alphabetized list below, see how many you recognize and then learn where each comes from and what they’re used for.

- **Allspice**, berry of the evergreen “pimento tree”; commonly used in Jamaican cooking. Tastes like a mix of cinnamon, nutmeg and cloves, thus the name “allspice.”
  
  **Uses**: chicken, beef, fish (key ingredient in “jerk” dishes), fruit desserts, cakes, cookies, apple cider.

- **Basil**, aromatic leaf of the bay laurel. Pungently aromatic, sweet, spicy flavor.
  
  **Uses**: essential ingredient in Italian and Thai dishes; main ingredient in pesto.

- **Bay leaf**, leaf of evergreen laurel. Aromatic, bitter, spicy, pungent flavor.
  
  **Uses**: soups, stews, braises and pâtés; used often in Mediterranean cuisine.
- **Caraway seed**, fruit of biennial herb of parsley family. Warm, biting, acrid but pleasant, slightly minty.
**Uses:** rye breads, baked goods; often used in European cuisine.

- **Cardamom**, seeds from fruit of perennial herb of ginger family; grown mostly in India; very expensive. Sweet and pungent flavor, highly aromatic.
**Uses:** Indian curry dishes, lunch meats.

- **Chives**, smallest species of the onion family. Onion flavor.
**Uses:** soups, salad dressings, dips.
- **Cilantro (coriander)**, annual flowering herb, can be cultivated for leaves, seeds, flower, and roots. May have “soapy” versus “herby” taste, based on genetics of taster.
  
  **Uses**: often used in Latin American, Indian and Chinese dishes; in salsa and guacamole, stir fry, grilled chicken or fish; best when used fresh.

- **Cloves**, dried flower buds from evergreen of myrtle family. Warm, spicy, astringent, fruity, slightly bitter flavor.
  
  **Uses**: whole cloves on ham or pork roast; ground cloves to season pear or apple desserts, beets, beans, tomatoes, squash and sweet potatoes.

- **Cumin seed**, seeds of flowering plant of parsley family. Earthy and warming flavor.
  
  **Uses**: curry powder, chilies, used throughout world (second most common seasoning after black ground pepper).

**Uses**: Asian dishes, marinade for chicken and fish, gingerbread, cookies, processed meats.

■ **Marjoram**, leaves and flowers of perennial of mint family. Sweet pine and citrus flavor.

**Uses**: meats, fish, poultry, vegetables, soups.

■ **Nutmeg**, seed of fruit of evergreen tree. Sweet, warm, pungent, aromatic, bitter flavor.

**Uses**: eggnog, French toast, cooked fruits, sweet potatoes, spinach.
- **Oregano**, leaves of perennial of the mint family. Related to marjoram, but very different flavor. Strong, pungent, aromatic, bitter flavor.

  **Uses:** Italian dishes, chili, beef stew, pork and vegetables.

- **Parsley**, leaves of a biennial herbaceous plant; curly and flat leaf varieties. Grassy, bitter flavor.

  **Uses:** widely used throughout world, including in meat, soup, vegetables; often used as garnish.


  **Uses:** flavoring in stuffing and roast lamb, pork, chicken and turkey.
- **Saffron**, spice derived from flower of iris family; very expensive. Earthy, sweet flavor.
  **Uses**: baked goods, rice dishes.

- **Sage**, medicinal plant of mint family. Slightly peppery flavor.
  **Uses**: often used to flavor fatty meals.

- **Tarragon**, flowering tops and leaves of a perennial herb, often called “dragon herb.” Minty “anise-like” (resembles licorice) flavor.
  **Uses**: chicken, fish, egg dishes; one of four fines herbes of French cooking.
■ **Thyme**, leaves and flowering tops of a shrub-like perennial of the mint family. Biting, sharp, spicy, herbaceous flavor; blends well with other herbs.

**Uses:** meats, soups and stews.

■ **Turmeric**, stem of plant of tropical perennial herb. Mild, peppery, mustardy, pungent taste.

**Uses:** curry powders, mustards, condiments.

---

Project To-dos Checklist

- Remove your selective eater’s highly preferred, not-so-healthy foods from the house this week. Give your child the option to choose anything else available in the home that he’d like to eat, and let him help you prepare it for the whole family.

How did it go?

- Embark on the kitchen makeover and restock your refrigerator and pantry with just the foods you need for the week, based on your meal plan and shopping list.

- Together with your selective eater, plant a mini herb garden in your backyard or windowsill.

- Try the kitchen traffic experiment (see Try It Out: The Kitchen Traffic Experiment on page 40).

What happened?

How might you modify the experiment for an even greater effect, or to broaden your child’s food interests further?

Project Check-in: Remembering the Bigger Picture Goals

1. What was your major goal for this 6-week Picky Eater Project? On a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being no progress; 10 being complete transformation), where do you think you fall so far? Why did you pick the number you picked? What would it take to get to a higher number?

2. How did your Family Mealtime Mission Statement play into your activities this week?

3. How closely do you think you followed your rules for “picky-free parenting” this week? Any adjustments that need to be made? How did the kids respond?

4. What went well?

5. What was really challenging?

6. How many times did your child try new foods?
Week 2 Recipes
Parmesan Yogurt Dip With Carrots

Greek yogurt is thicker than regular yogurt, which is why Adam Collick, former assistant White House chef, uses it here. We’ve adapted his recipe but have retained the great flavor and all the benefits. Using Greek yogurt nets a nice thick dip with even more protein than if you use traditional yogurt.

—Recipe by Adam Collick

**Kitchen Gear**
- Measuring cup
- Sharp knife
- Cutting board
- Zester or grater
- Bowl
- Mixing spoon

**Ingredients**
- 2 cups plain Greek yogurt
- 1 small garlic clove, peeled and minced
- Juice and grated zest of 1 small lemon
- ½ cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese
- Kosher salt and black pepper to taste
- 1 bunch (or bag) baby carrots

**Instructions**
1. Combine the yogurt, garlic, lemon zest and juice, and Parmesan cheese in a bowl and mix well.
2. Add salt and pepper until it tastes the way you like it. Serve with carrots.

**Personalize It**
Use other vegetables besides (or alongside) carrots, such as
- Celery
- Cucumber
- Cherry tomatoes
- Peppers
- Broccoli
- Cauliflower
- Jicama
- Black olives
- Squash (zucchini/summer squash)

**Kids in the Kitchen**
- Let your child measure all the ingredients.
- Teach your child how to grate lemon zest and Parmesan cheese.
- Let your child mix and taste test.
Chili is pretty great in the winter! It warms you up on the inside.

### Spicy Turkey Chili

**Hands-on time:** 45 minutes  
**Total time:** 1 hour, 45 minutes  
**Makes:** 12 cups

- **Spicy Turkey Chili**
  - **Hands-on time:** 45 minutes  
  - **Total time:** 1 hour, 45 minutes  
  - **Makes:** 12 cups

#### Ingredients

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ingredient</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 teaspoons olive or vegetable oil</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 large yellow or purple onion, chopped</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 bell peppers (any color is fine), seeded and diced</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 garlic cloves, peeled and finely chopped</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1¼ pound ground turkey or chicken</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 to 4 tablespoons chili powder</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1½ teaspoon dried oregano</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1 to 2 teaspoons ground cumin</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1 teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes (if you like spicy)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¼ teaspoon cayenne (if you like spicy)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 (16-ounce) cans dark red kidney beans, drained and rinsed well with cold water</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 (16-ounce) can black beans, drained and rinsed well with cold water</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 (28-ounce) can diced tomatoes, including the juice</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1 (28-ounce) can tomato puree</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 cup shredded cheddar cheese</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 cup plain yogurt</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>½ cup chopped fresh cilantro leaves</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 limes, quartered for squeezing</td>
<td></td>
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#### Kitchen Gear

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Description</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Can opener</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measuring spoons</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharp knife</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cutting board</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Measuring cup</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strainer or colander</td>
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<tr>
<td>Large heavy-bottomed soup pot with a lid</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large spoon</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oven mitts</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Instructions
1. Place the pot on the stove and turn the heat to medium. When it is hot, add the oil.
2. Add the onion, peppers, and garlic and cook until the onion is very soft, about 20 minutes. Stir from time to time.
3. Add the turkey (or chicken) a little bit at a time, stirring after each addition, until it just starts to turn white. Add the spices and cook, stirring, 5 minutes.
4. Add the beans, tomatoes, and tomato puree and cook covered, stirring occasionally, for 30 minutes.
5. Cook uncovered until thick, about an additional 30 minutes.
6. Serve right away garnished with cheese, yogurt, cilantro leaves, and limes.

Kids in the Kitchen
- Have your child measure each ingredient before adding to the pot.
- Allow your child to stir and mix the ingredients.
- Teach your child how to drain and rinse the beans.
- Show your child how to use a can opener.

Personalize It
- Substitute ground beef for the ground turkey or chicken.
- Vary the beans and substitute chickpeas or white beans.
- Substitute the fresh cilantro with fresh basil leaves.
Sweet Potato Spinach Baby Puree

### Hands-on time: 10 minutes
### Total time: 25 minutes
### Makes: 1 cup

**Kitchen Gear**
- Sharp knife
- Cutting board
- Measuring cup
- Small pot
- Handheld blender or masher

**Ingredients**
- 1 sweet potato, scrubbed and sliced (The thinner the slices, the faster it will cook.)
- ¾ cup fresh flat-leaf spinach leaves, finely chopped

**Instructions**
1. Put the sweet potato slices in the pot, cover with water, and bring to a boil over high heat.
2. Lower the heat to medium, add the spinach, and cook until the sweet potato is tender, about 15 minutes. If necessary, drain off the water.
3. Mash or puree. Set aside to cool to room temperature or cover and refrigerate up to 2 days.

**Kids in the Kitchen**
- Let your child scrub the sweet potato.
- If using a potato masher, allow your child to mash the mixture.
- If using a food processor, allow your child to press the power buttons.

**Personalize It**
- Substitute the sweet potato with carrots or butternut squash.
- Substitute the spinach with kale.
Roasted Vegetables

You can eat these hot or cold, alone, or paired with pasta or rice.

**Kitchen Gear**
- Measuring cup
- Pot holder
- Sharp knife
- Cutting board
- Measuring spoons
- Mixing bowl
- Large spoon
- Large baking sheet with sides

**Ingredients**
- 1 red onion, diced
- 1 red bell pepper, seeded and diced
- 1 yellow bell pepper, seeded and diced
- 2 yellow squash, diced
- 2 zucchini, diced
- 4 garlic cloves, peeled, and chopped or minced
- 1 teaspoon olive oil
- ¼ teaspoon dried thyme
- ½ teaspoon kosher salt
- ¼ teaspoon black pepper
- 2 cups grape or cherry tomatoes

**Instructions**
1. Turn the oven on and set it to 400 degrees Fahrenheit.

2. Put the onion, bell peppers, squash, zucchini, garlic, olive oil, thyme, salt, and pepper in a bowl and mix well.

3. Pour the vegetables onto a baking sheet, making sure the vegetables are in a single layer. Place the baking sheet in the oven and bake for 25 minutes.

4. Remove the baking sheet from the oven and put it on top of the stove. Add the tomatoes and stir to make sure everything is well mixed.

5. Return to the oven and cook until everything is lightly browned, about 20 minutes. Serve right away or cover and refrigerate up to 2 days.
Roasted Vegetables (cont)

**Personalize It**
Prepare small bowls of the following additions for before, during, or after cooking:
- Sweet potatoes
- Red potatoes
- Carrots

**Kids in the Kitchen**
- Show your child how to wash vegetables.
- Have your child mix all of the ingredients together. Quiz your child: How many ingredients did you add? What colors are the ingredients you added?
Layered Yogurt Parfait

*Parfait* usually refers to an ice-cream concoction layered in a fancy glass, but it’s really a French word that means “perfect.” When you try our healthy breakfast version, we think you’ll see why!

**Kitchen Gear**
- Sharp knife
- Cutting board
- Measuring spoon
- 4 short glasses
- Measuring cup

**Ingredients**
- 2 cups plain yogurt
- 2 cups fresh berries or chopped fruit
- ½ cup homemade or store-bought granola, or a combination of mixed nuts and dried fruit

**Instructions**
1. Put ¼ cup yogurt in each glass and top with ¼ cup fruit. Repeat once.
2. Top each glass with 2 tablespoons granola and serve right away.

**Personalize It**
Prepare small bowls of the following additions for before, during, or after cooking:
- Fresh blueberries, strawberries, or raspberries
- Wheat germ
- Nuts (eg, almonds, peanuts, walnuts, pecans)
- Jam (eg, raspberry, blueberry, grape, strawberry, apricot)
- Flavored yogurt (eg, banana, strawberry, vanilla, blueberry)
- Honey

**Kids in the Kitchen**
- Show your child how to assemble the parfait—use a clear glass so she can see each layer of ingredients.
- Teach your child how to measure ¼ cup of each ingredient.
- Explain to your child that a parfait is typically layered in a pattern—can your child identify the pattern?
- Count how many layers are in the parfait.
A burger will take on the personality of whatever meat you use: chicken or turkey makes a mild burger, lamb makes a very meaty-tasting one, and pork makes a burger that’s almost like sausage. Experiment to find out what you like best.

**Kitchen Gear**
- Measuring spoons
- Sharp knife
- Cutting board
- Skillet
- Spatula
- Plate

**Ingredients**
- 1 pound ground chicken, turkey, pork, or lamb
- ½ teaspoon kosher salt
- ¼ teaspoon black pepper (if you like)
- 4 hamburger rolls, sliced in half and toasted (if you like)
- 4 tomato slices
- 4 lettuce leaves
- Ketchup, mustard, or special toppings

**Instructions**
1. Put the raw meat on the cutting board and divide into 4 balls of equal size.
2. Gently press down each ball to form a patty about ¾ to 1 inch thick.
3. Using your thumb, make a ½-inch dent about the size of a quarter in the middle of each side.
4. Sprinkle both sides of the patties with salt (and pepper if you like).
5. Put the skillet on the stove and turn the heat to high. Wait 2 minutes for the pan to heat up and then add the patties to the dry pan.
6. Cook until crusty brown on the outside, about 5 minutes; then flip the patties and cook until crusty brown on the other side, another 5 minutes.
7. Put the bottom half of each roll on a big plate and top each with a burger. Top the burger with a tomato slice and lettuce leaf. Add ketchup, mustard, or other toppings. Then cover with the top of the roll. Serve right away.
Safety Tip
Handle the patties as little as possible, and wash your hands after touching raw meat.

Personalize It
Prepare small bowls of the following additions for after cooking:
- Sliced bell peppers
- Sliced onions
- Cheese slices
- Sliced or mashed avocado

Kids in the Kitchen
- Let your child roll and press the burgers on his own.
- Practice flipping the burgers using a spatula.
- Count how many toppings you can add to your burger.
- See how colorful your toppings are—can you add all the colors of the rainbow?
Energy Bars

These are super fun to make and even better to eat. Serve them for an after-school treat or crumbled on top of yogurt for breakfast.

**Kitchen Gear**
- Measuring cup
- Measuring spoons
- Wax or parchment paper
- Medium-sized bowl
- Small bowl
- Large spoon
- 8 × 8 inch pan
- Plastic wrap
- Dinner knife
- Cutting board

**Ingredients**
- ½ cup lightly toasted* nuts (one kind or a combination of almonds, walnuts, and pecans)
- ¾ cup dried fruit (one kind or a combination of raisins, currants, and dried cranberries or chopped dates, prunes, apricots, and peaches)
- ¾ cup quick-cooking oats
- ¾ cup crispy-rice cereal
- ½ cup almond or peanut butter
- ¼ cup honey or maple syrup
- ½ teaspoon vanilla extract

**Instructions**
1. Line the pan with wax or parchment paper and leave enough hanging so you can use it to cover the bars later. (You will need a piece a little more than twice the size of the bottom of the pan.)
2. Put the nuts, dried fruit, oats, rice cereal, and coconut (if using), in the medium-sized bowl and toss well.
3. Put the almond or (peanut butter) and honey in the small bowl and microwave until the butter is softened, about 30 seconds. Stir until smooth. Add the vanilla and stir again until smooth.
4. Pour the almond mixture into the medium-sized bowl and mix with the large spoon until well combined.
5. Dump the mixture into the prepared pan and pat down as hard as you can. You want to make the bars solid (rather than airy). Using the overhanging wax paper, cover the bars completely. Cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate at least 4 hours and up to 1 week.
6. Using the knife, cut into 16 pieces.

*To toast nuts, put them on a small baking sheet in a 350-degree Fahrenheit oven until they are fragrant and look a shade darker, around 5 minutes.
Personalize It
- Add 2 tablespoons unsweetened coconut.
- Add 1 tablespoon flaxseed.

Kids in the Kitchen
- Teach your child how to measure each ingredient.
- Encourage your child to decide which nuts and dried fruit to use.
- Let your child press the energy bars into the pan as hard as she can.
Dear Reader,

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eBook: [https://shop.aap.org/the-picky-eater-project-ebook/](https://shop.aap.org/the-picky-eater-project-ebook/)

Happy reading!

Sincerely,

The Team at HealthyChildren.org