

## Eat your Spinach!!! How to get kids to eat great foods, and LOVE it!

By Vicki Latham PA-C

Loading my groceries onto the conveyor belt at the checkout stand...fruits, vegetables, nut butters, whole grain pasta...the clerk said to me, "who is going to eat all this stuff?". "Me and my kids", I said casually. "Your kids actually eat this stuff?" she questioned. "They will eat it or they will starve", I responded emphatically. As a mother, and grandmother, have I learned a trick or two about how to get kids to eat healthy!

A major key is to start early. Breastfeeding is always best, of course. Don't start trying to get your baby to eat solid foods until they are ready. What do you need to be able to do, to eat? Sit up and have hand to mouth coordination. When they can sit up alone, and start trying to grab the food off the table to put in their mouth, it's time. I smashed banana with breast milk, put a pile of it on their high chair table, gave them a spoon and let them have at it...spoon, fingers, whatever...yes they made a mess, at first. Then I did the same with rice cereal...but I made my own. Whole grain organic brown rice, cooked and ground up in the food grinder and mixed with a little breast milk...same pile, same spoon. They quickly figured it out. Then it was time for the finger foods, starting with veggies. Avocado slices, peas, steamed broccoli trees, whole cooked carrots, etc. Things they could pick up and put in their mouth but not get choked on. I rarely ever helped my kids eat, I didn't spoon feed them, they fed themselves. By a year, they were eating, on a plate, whatever I was serving the rest of us, and not making much of a mess of it either. I didn't start fruits till after they had developed a taste for most veggies. I also did a lot of diluted freshly juiced vegetables. No eggs or dairy till after a year. No sugar till 2 was my rule, and that was rare. Candy was raisins, and dried cranberries, apples, pineapple, and mangos and NEVER any soda pop.

Then as they got older, and there were eventually 5 of them, I had very little time for cooking. So I developed the concept I called SNACK LUNCH. I made them a healthy breakfast. Then for lunch, I just put a large platter on the table around 11:45am that stayed there till 1pm. They could just run by grab and eat, or sit down. But it was basically all finger foods, made mostly of leftovers. Sometimes I would make happy faces or designs with it, just for fun. It would include raw veggies, nuts, nutbutters, meats cut in to bite size slices, hard boiled eggs, various cheeses, etc. They could just choose whatever they wanted and eat as much as they wanted. I knew nothing they would eat would be a bad choice. Mid afternoon, I would set out a fruit plate for their afternoon snack.

Then dinner would be a complex carbohydrate, or meat and vegetables, and salads, mostly. We had a lot of vegetarian type meals: eggplant parmesan, spinach lasagna, and lots of beans and rice. I tried to follow the proper food combining regimen as often as I could and still provide variety and yumminess to my menu. Dessert was rare...mostly cooked fruits, or berries with ice cream, or yogurt, etc...we had a huge apricot tree, and our favorite was apricot pie. I made healthy cookies from whole grains and honey.

I never allowed food to become a power issue. We did have the 3 bite rule, you had to eat 3 bites of everything...but you could decide the size of the bite. We just didn't have junk food in the house, so

they didn't eat it. From day one, they ate healthy foods, and that was all they knew existed. Yes, there was the "grandparents bringing candy to my deprived children" issue, and the "donuts at church" issue, and the "eating at a friend's house" issue. But they discovered they didn't feel as well, and they didn't have a "taste" for it, when it wasn't their normal diet.

Recently, my daughter, Dana, called to say that she was standing in the line at the grocery store. "Mom, I just called to tell you something...I'm looking at my cart full of vegetables and fruits, and organic meat, and I'm looking at everyone else in line here with their carts full of white bread, soda pop, and chips, and they look so unhealthy. I just wanted to say 'thank you' for teaching me to eat right".

Someday they will love you for your efforts to feed them well. I promise you, they will.