

15 tips every parent needs to know (before bribing their kids with chocolate!)

How do you transform a young family's eating habits to include more healthy fruit and veg and a more varied diet? That's the question mother of three Fiona Faulkner asked herself when her daughter flatly refused to eat fruit and her son turned his nose up at anything new. Clever tactics were called for...

In the many children's cookery workshops I've carried out, there are a few things I've learnt for sure. One is that if you allow kids into the kitchen, they're much more likely to want to eat the fruit (and hopefully veg) of their labour. We're all cash strapped and time poor - I'm the first to admit to this - but it's vital to set aside time to cook with your kids. If you don't teach them a few basics and inspire that love of good food, it's unlikely anyone else will, including schools.

Children respond better to food they know they're going to be served, so try to avoid surprises - and it's good to give them some say in the matter. When it comes to food, kids love choices. If you think about it, we'd all feel a little upset, too, never having any control over what's for dinner.

I've always enjoyed cooking, but when I became a parent things got more complicated. I knew the importance of giving my kids a balanced diet, but it seemed all 'kids' recipes focused on cupcakes and the like. Don't get me wrong,

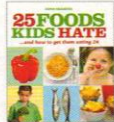
I love to bake (in fact, I'm a baking geek!), but I needed something else.

We all have a comfort zone when it comes to cooking. But getting your children enthused about the food they eat is not about having a great set of recipes up your sleeve, it's about knowing who you are as a family. Yes, I can show you how to create pesto from spinach, or ice cream from avocado - but if you're not excited about these vegetables, how can you expect your kids to be?

Good eating habits have to be learnt - and therefore taught. Really, I think it's about giving fruit and vegetables some clever PR.

SAVE 30%

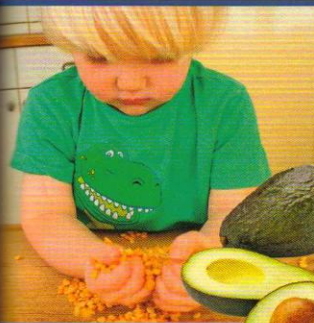
Fiona has written a book full of advice and ideas. You can buy it for £9 (usual price £12.99), plus free UK P&P, from newhollandpublishers.com (use the code 25 Foods delicious).



1 GET THEM SHOPPING I'm not exactly on trend here and neither am I suggesting you take kids on every food shop (or eschew the working parents' Sacred Online Delivery). But try involving your children in some small way - can they help write out the list?

2 INVITE THEIR FOODIE FRIENDS You'd be amazed at what your child will eat when they see their friends tucking into the same with gusto.

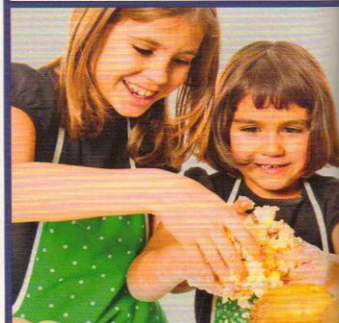
4 BECOME A MARKETING GURU Adults eat with their taste buds, sense of smell and emotion, but kids eat with their ears, eyes and head. If they don't like the look or sound of something, they won't eat it. It's important to 'PR' each food in the most effective way possible when putting together a meal. Making sandwiches? Don't underestimate the power of a cookie cutter.



5 OFFER REALISTIC PORTION SIZES Little tummies need little amounts.

6 IF THEY WON'T EAT 'EM, JUICE 'EM! I promise you that getting clever with fresh juicing will revolutionise your kids' fruit and (especially) veg intake.

7 DON'T FALL INTO THE 'EVERY LAST SCRAP' TRAP By forcing children to eat everything on their plate, you're encouraging them to over-eat as well as ignore those vital 'I'm full' signals from their brain. Not good.



8 GROW YOUR OWN Gardening with kids is yet another time challenge for knackered parents, so my advice is to think of someone who's a good gardener and ask them to help get you started. Plus: grow stuff you know you'll want to eat - and always include strawberries on that list. Come summer, you'll be a hero.

9 ...OR AT LEAST PICK YOUR OWN All the taste, none of the hassle!

10 WATCH SNACK ATTACKS Be careful that the snacks you give aren't too filling or offered too close to mealtimes.



11 CHANGE THE SCENERY Shake up the routine and have a tea party in the playhouse or a breakfast picnic in the garden.

12 THINK ABOUT YOUR CHILD'S PERSONALITY Interestingly, research suggests that children who are particularly sensitive to new surroundings, textures or even loud noise can be reticent about trying new foods. Consider the role your child's personality has to play when it comes to experimenting with food and try to make the circumstances as familiar as possible. It might just make a difference.

13 USE THE DISTRACTION TECHNIQUE I'm a great fan of offering (healthy) snacks in front of the kids' favourite TV show.

14 DON'T BE THE PARTY-BAG POOPER Basically, don't create issues around food (or succumb to performance parenting by offering books and a balloon instead). Your kids don't need an alpha mum on their birthday - they just want loot and cake. Embrace it.



15 NEITHER REWARD NOR PUNISH WITH FOOD I base this on a theory called the over-justification hypothesis. The premise is that kids enjoy something less if they realise they're being rewarded for eating it - one to remember next time you're considering bribing with dessert. ☑

