



## Make healthful eating fun for kids

**I'm trying to get my children to eat healthier, but they constantly ask for high-sugar cereal and other foods that aren't good for them. How can I entice them to eat healthier foods?**

First, remember that they're kids. Mealtimes (and snack times, too) should be good, even fun, experiences.

But that doesn't mean they have to consist entirely of cookies and candy. One thing to think about, even with fruits and vegetables, is presentation. It can make all the difference.

A study published recently in the *Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine* examined elementary school children's choices between a cookie and an apple (or both) at the end of their cafeteria serving line. The number of kids choosing apples skyrocketed when the apples had a sticker featuring Elmo, a popular character from *Sesame Street*. Interestingly, putting a sticker of an unknown character also increased apple choice, but not by nearly as much.

Another study, published in *Pediatrics* in 2010, showed that children were more likely to choose a snack — whether it was gummy bears or baby carrots — if the wrapper had a familiar character on it (in this case, the characters tested included Shrek, Scooby-Doo and Dora the Explorer).

The findings suggest that the makers of healthy foods can use

marketing and branding concepts to increase their products' appeal to children much the same way as big-name processed foods have done for decades. But it can be expensive. According to the Federal Trade Commission, the food industry spends an estimated \$1.6 billion annually to market food and beverages directly to children and teens.

Still, there are a few things you can do at home to boost your children's interest in healthy food:

- Let your kids help in the kitchen. Even children as young as 2 can help wipe tables, tear lettuce or greens, snap green beans, and rinse produce. Getting kids involved with meal preparation will increase their enthusiasm to eat the foods they help prepare.

- Help your kids make fun, healthy snacks. Ideas include "Bugs on a Log," made by filling celery with a little peanut butter and placing raisins on top, or "Fruit Kebobs," made by putting melon balls and cubes of fruit on a stick.

- Most of all, be a good role model. Pile those vegetables high on your dinner plate. Drink your milk. Choose whole-grain foods you enjoy, and share them with your children. As with anything, children learn more from watching what you do than from listening to what you say.

*Chow Line is a service of Ohio State University Extension and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Send questions to Chow Line, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH, 43210-1044, or [filipic.3@osu.edu](mailto:filipic.3@osu.edu).*



THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY  
OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY  
EXTENSION

OHIO AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH  
AND DEVELOPMENT CENTER

---

**Aug. 31, 2012**

---

By **Martha Filipic**  
614-292-9833  
[filipic.3@osu.edu](mailto:filipic.3@osu.edu)

**Editor:**

This column was reviewed by Dan Remley, field specialist for Ohio State University Extension in family nutrition and wellness.

---

**Communications and Technology News and Marketing**  
2021 Coffey Road  
Columbus, OH 43210-1044  
614-292-2011

208 Research Services Building  
1680 Madison Ave.  
Wooster, OH 44691-4096  
330-263-3780

Ohio State University Extension embraces human diversity and is committed to ensuring that all research and related educational programs are available to clientele on a nondiscriminatory basis without regard to race, color, religion, sex, age, national origin, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, disability, or veteran status. This statement is in accordance with United States Civil Rights Laws and the USDA. *Keith L. Smith, Ph.D., Associate Vice President for Agricultural Administration and Director, Ohio State University Extension. For Deaf and Hard of Hearing, please contact Ohio State University Extension using your preferred communication (e-mail, relay services, or video relay services). Phone 1-800-750-0750 between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. EST Monday through Friday. Inform the operator to dial 614-292-6181.*