

HOW MANY COLORS HAVE WE EATEN?

By Noelle Armstrong

Summer has ended, back-to-school shopping is complete, and the school busses are coming down the street. Now we're thinking about healthy snacks and lunches to pack for school. What do the children like, what do they eat, what comes back unopened in the lunchbox?

I have two children, and I know how frustrating this whole process can be. How do we get our children to eat healthy or want to make better choices?

One way is to talk to your kids about why it's important to try healthy foods. We know that fruits and veggies are good for you; they have antioxidants and fiber, vitamins and minerals. Kids will hear this speech, and they may listen, or they may not. Let's try it another way. Talk to your children about the activities they enjoy. Soccer, baseball, dance, basketball. Certain foods will give them more energy, make them stronger and help them run faster, throw a ball harder, think better and give them more energy to play. I call these green-light foods. Green means go — go ahead and eat them.

Some foods are okay to eat sometimes, but they can slow you down if you eat too many. These are more of a yellow-light food: cupcakes, juice boxes, donuts, fast food and white bread. Then there are some foods that don't do anything to help your body; hot dogs, soda and chips can make you feel too full to eat your healthier food. These are red-light foods. Red lights mean stop, and these foods won't give you any energy, slowing you down and making you feel like sitting on the sofa, not playing or doing your homework.

Getting your kids involved in shopping at a local farm stand or grocery store will help with what they are willing to try. I am a big fan of Hanson's Farm on Rte. 104 and Peterson's Farm stand on South St., both in Bridgewater. Both have great selections, always fresh, and it's actually fun to stop and check out what they have in that week. The kids love to go and find how many colors we can put in our basket. Colors are a great way to get them involved and interested. Talk to your kids about colors of food. The deeper the color the better it tastes and the better it is for your body. Brown rice is better than white rice; dark lettuce has more nutrients than light green lettuce. This is a fun way for them to learn about nutrition.

Bringing your kids into the kitchen will help also. I don't mean they have to prepare the whole meal, but if my Jack helps me chop one carrot or take the ends off of the green beans, he will be happy he helped to make the meal and will try a new vegetable.



Kids need to train their taste buds for new foods. They might taste a little strange at first, but if they try even a few bites when something is served the better it will taste to them later. A few bites can go a long way.

This can be a great process for the whole family. Pretty soon you will notice that there is less time spent on "food battles" and more time spent enjoying yourselves together.

Here is a great-kid friendly recipe and easy to make, too. You can also prepare this in the microwave for a hearty but healthy breakfast. By including the pumpkin or the sweet potato you are also eating foods that are fresh and in season in the fall.

Oatmeal

1 cup nonfat milk or soy milk

¼ cup firmly packed dark brown organic sugar

¼ cup canned organic pumpkin or sweet potato puree.

(Fresh pumpkin would be better, but you can use canned organic for quick and easy.)

1 tsp. pure vanilla extract

¼ tsp. cinnamon or pumpkin pie spice

1 cup old-fashioned oats

2 tsp. natural peanut butter

Dried fruit and nuts

Pure maple syrup for serving

In a small saucepan, combine the milk, sugar, pumpkin, vanilla and spice. Bring to a gentle boil and stir in the oatmeal. Reduce the heat and simmer for 2 to 3 minutes, until the oatmeal is soft and creamy. Stir in the peanut butter.

Spoon the oatmeal into bowls, sprinkle with dried fruit and nuts, if you like, and serve warm with maple syrup.

Serves 4

Recipe idea from *Deceptively Delicious*, by Jessica Seinfeld

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