

Trade Secrets

Fresh tips for feeding fussy eaters from a nutritionist mom

by MADELEINE GREY

Think you've got it tough nourishing your picky eaters? Try feeding the fussy when nutrition is your livelihood. That's what Kitchener, Ont., dietitian Caroline Valeriotte faces when she goes home to her kids, Anita, 12, and Timothy, eight. How can she help but take her work home with her?

"I try to separate professional-me from the me-as-mom," she says. "I try to let my guard down a little and not always think in terms of the four food groups."

But delve a little deeper and Valeriotte admits to wearing a "mini-uniform" at home. She'll even concede that her kids have grown up with *Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating* "in their faces" — it has hung on the fridge for years and, if that's not enough, they often use a portable food guide slider-gizmo to make quick calculations.

"People assume my kids are perfect eaters," she says, wearily. "They think I serve only healthy foods at home." Truth is, her kids do eat cookies, cake and chips. They prefer their veggies raw and (gasp) often balk at trying new foods. As far as Valeriotte is concerned, they are normal, healthy eaters. How does she manage that? Here are some of Valeriotte's tricks from her trade.

GET READY, GET SET

Valeriotte starts every week the same way: She spends 10 minutes on Sundays planning "a week's worth of dinners that include a balance of what the family likes and what they need exposure to." One night is reserved for leftovers and one for takeout. To shake things up, Valeriotte includes a new recipe in the lineup. Once scripted,



The Dish on Portions	
calories	388
protein	19.1 g
fat	19.3 g
carbohydrates	37 g
calcium	38%*
zinc	28%*
vitamin A	20%*
vitamin B ₁₂	22%*

*of recommended daily amount

the plan gets posted on the fridge. The posting is essential, she emphasizes, because it lets everyone know what to expect and helps enlist support.

DIVVY UP

"Delegate!" says Valeriotte, who expects her children to join in, whether it's meal plan ideas, setting and clearing the table, or cleaning up. Occasional weeknights, her husband, Patrick, starts supper before she gets home from work. Not only does delegating give Valeriotte a break, but when everyone gets involved, the odds increase for healthy eating.

PLEASING THE PICKY

Funny how most kids are willing to try a new flavour of ice cream, but are steely in their resolve against Brussels

sprouts. When Valeriotte encounters this, her strategy is to ask, "How many bites do you think you can manage?" Often this works — but not always.

When the answer is "none," Valeriotte drops the push for consumption, but she doesn't close the door to conversation. Sometimes asking what exactly a child dislikes about a food ("it looks gross") leads to comparisons with foods that look similar (just as gross) but are welcomed with open jaws.

SNACKS TO THE RESCUE

"When I'm at home, I try *not* to keep track of the servings my kids are eating," says Valeriotte. "It's a numbers game and I don't want to get caught in it." Instead, she looks at the whole week, not just one meal or even one day.

And when the nutrition picture gets a little blurred? Valeriotte says healthy snacks are her ace in the hole. Snacks can be like little meals, covering several of the food groups (especially protein and carbohydrates) to provide more lasting energy. "I tell myself not to worry, we can catch up with healthy snacks, such as a bowl of frozen blueberries, a smoothie or my favourite: a bowl of cereal."

In fact, bedtime snacks are now her kids' responsibility — another way Valeriotte is slowly shifting the goals of healthy eating to the kids. "They make smoothies together and have a lot of fun adding ingredients and tasting the results."

THE POWER OF PATIENCE

Kids do not become amazing eaters instantly, and many parents get discouraged with this seemingly uphill battle. The trick is to not give up. "Parents need to keep challenging their kids to try new foods," says Valeriotte. "There is always something to introduce or reintroduce. It requires patience and a willingness to deal with the negative reactions kids have to these foods."

Valeriotte says her children have expanded their food preferences "100 percent" since they were toddlers. Does she ever get caught in food power struggles with her son, Timothy? "No," she states. "I'm a very patient person and I remind myself that nutrition is *my* thing, not theirs." She also tries to look at the big picture.

"A meal is just a snapshot in a lifetime of consumption," she says. Not every family meal is going to please everyone. "If we have a dinner that doesn't appeal to my son, and he leaves the table eating next to nothing, I focus on the glass of milk that he *did* finish and tell myself, 'That part went well.'" ♥

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Double-Duty Macaroni and Cheese



This calcium-rich recipe is designed to please picky eaters *and* the cook, making enough to freeze an extra supper for a future night off. Whole wheat is the way to go for the macaroni and the bread crumbs.

- 3** slices whole wheat bread, torn up
- 1 tbsp** (15 mL) butter, diced
- 1 lb** (500 g) aged cheddar cheese
- 4 cups** (1 L) whole wheat macaroni (1 lb/500 g)
- ¼ cup** (50 mL) butter
- ¼ cup** (50 mL) all-purpose flour
- 1½ tsp** (7 mL) dry mustard
- ¼ tsp** (1 mL) cayenne
- 5 cups** (1.25 L) 1% milk
- 1 tsp** (5 mL) salt

Place torn bread and butter in a food processor and pulse 10 to 15 times or until the crumbs are small. Transfer to a medium bowl. Using the grater attachment, shred cheese. Add 1 cup of the shredded cheese to the bread crumb mixture.

In a large pot of boiling salted water, cook macaroni until tender. Drain and rinse. In another large pot, melt butter at medium-high heat until foaming, add flour, mustard and cayenne, and whisk constantly for 1 minute. Cup by cup, add milk, whisking constantly. Bring milk to a full boil, reduce to medium heat and continue to whisk for 5 minutes, or until the mixture has a thick creamy consistency. Turn off heat, add shredded cheese and salt, whisking until smooth and well combined. Heat pot at medium, add drained macaroni and stir for about 2 minutes or until the pasta is hot.

Turn on broiler. Pour pasta and sauce evenly into two 9 in. (23 cm) square pans. Sprinkle half of the bread crumb mixture over each casserole. Place one casserole under broiler for 3 minutes or until golden brown. Allow to sit for 5 minutes before serving.
Serves 4 to 6.

The sequel: Wrap other casserole with plastic wrap, then foil. Freeze for up to 4 months. To cook, defrost overnight in the fridge or in the microwave. Bake at 350°F (180°C) for 40 minutes and place under broiler 3 minutes to create a golden, crunchy top.

Our recipe tester, Adell Shneer, tests Nutrition using both imperial and metric measurements. However, proportions in the metric version may differ slightly from the original, causing small variations in the result.