



KIDS NUTRITION

Dinner dilemmas

Create quick, easy and nutritious food for kids; **BREE FULLER** discovers how parents can do it and maintain their sanity.

It is a parent's endless battle: hastily ferrying kids to and from afternoon sport, doing the groceries, supervising homework, and then summoning enough energy to whip up a nutritious dinner.

Already struggling with the pressure-cooker lifestyle of long work hours, busy family lives and rocketing living expenses, parents are now faced with the responsibility of reversing the childhood obesity epidemic.

Lisa Poole, a working, single mother-of-six, is all too familiar with the difficulties of providing - and convincing her children to eat - good, nutritious foods.

Solving the daily food dilemma is no easy feat for the Berkeley mum, who has to consider the nutritional needs of everyone from her one-year-old toddler, Keedan, to her eldest child, Steven, 13, who suffers from Crohn's disease and a green food dye allergy.

But like most parents, Poole says it is the seemingly simple tasks that cause the biggest

problems.

"Picking good food that makes everybody happy is definitely a challenge," Poole admits.

"The kids get sick of things so quickly. One day they'll like it and the next they'll say 'Why did you give me that? I don't like that'.

"But it's not that they don't like the taste, it's just someone else (at school) has something different in their lunch box.

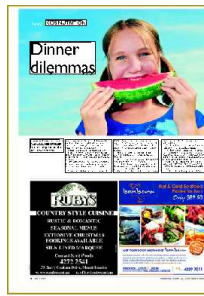
"And I couldn't serve the same meal twice in one week, no way - that's a cardinal sin here."

Worrying about the evening meal, lunch box snacks and nutrition is only the half of it, Poole says. Dealing with the cost of food and the fact that she has more breakfast cereals than she does children, is also a routine hassle for the busy mother.

Dietitians Susie Burrell and Milena Katz say finding nutritious food solutions for children is relatively quick and simple - if you have the right guidance.

Burrell, a child nutrition specialist, and Katz, a





mother, offer parents some advice on how to get children on track to healthy eating.

WHAT KIDS NEED

Parents do not have to be a rocket scientist or gourmet chef to get children's nutrition right, Katz explains.

"Parents have high expectations of themselves to provide these amazing meals .. (but) the real things they should be providing aren't as complicated as they think they need to be," she says.

"Kids need what adults need - there is no real difference in the nutrients that children need - they just need some in smaller quantities to reflect their body size.

"They need a variety of fruit, vegetables, wholegrain cereals, breads, meats, fish and chicken, all of (which) provide different micro and macro-nutrients."

Nutrition is more simple if parents consider food as a type of "medicine" for their children, Katz says.

Burrell recommends that parents place emphasis on young children and adolescents consuming three servings of dairy and meat each day.

"The key foods the kids need are the calcium-rich dairy and the iron-containing meats and proteins," Burrell says.

If your children are not fond of meat, both dietitians suggest using mince to make rissoles, meatballs or hamburger patties.

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DINNER TIME

The evening scramble to make dinner is a recurring nightmare for parents. Burrell says that keeping food simple but interesting is the key to success.

"Kids like plain food, they don't like mixed meals," she explains.

"They want to be able to see the different parts."

Burrell suggests putting everything in the middle of the table and letting the children select what they want. If they do not like what is on offer, she says it is important for parents to stand their ground.

"Kids will eat food when there's a range of things on their plate which they like - if there is nothing else available.

"So you need that strength of knowing what a balanced meal is, preparing it and then being prepared to say 'That's it'."

A healthy, balanced meal can be anything from a barbecue chicken and vegetables to fish, salad and some oven-baked chips. A combination of cooked or fresh vegetables and (preferably) lean meat is the basis of any good, nutritional meal.

Burrell also says children are more likely to enjoy the meal if they have helped cook and prepare it.

LUNCH BOXES

Packing lunches is easy if parents use a variety of snacks and foods on a rotational basis, Katz says.

"It's just a matter of talking to them about the sorts of fillings or snacks that they're willing to try and having a rotating roster so they don't get too bored," she explains.

Cold rice or pasta salads, rice paper rolls, cold chicken legs and savoury muffins are some nutritional alternatives to the regular lunch snacks.

Having at least 10 different lunch and snack options should maintain a child's interest.

Quick food tips

Use the weekend to prepare large batches of frozen meals. Frozen meals maintain their nutrition and are a great meal solution on busy nights.

If fast food is a must, aim for healthier options. Take the food home and add some steamed vegetables or salad to the meal.

Realise that older children can be a help in the kitchen. Even simple tasks like washing or peeling the vegetables can save you time.

Memorise some quick recipes and ensure you always have the ingredients on hand.

Encourage your teenagers to share the cooking duties at least once a week.



Colourful fruit skewers

Author: Lynne Mullins

INGREDIENTS:

- 12 wooden skewers
- 1 large ripe mango, peeled
- 2 large oranges, peeled
- 2 large bananas, peeled
- 250g small strawberries, hulled
- 1-2 tblspn butter
- 1 tblspn lime juice
- ½ cup honey
- 1 cup vanilla yoghurt

METHOD

1. Soak skewers in cold water for 20-30 minutes.
2. Cut mango and oranges into 3cm

- chunks. Cut bananas into 3cm slices.
3. Thread fruit onto skewers, alternating the varieties, and place on an oven tray.
4. Combine butter, lime juice and honey in a small saucepan and stir over low heat until butter has melted and mixture is smooth. Pour mixture over fruit, turning to coat.
5. Cook skewers on a lightly greased barbecue or grill plate until warm. Cool and serve with yoghurt.

Makes 12.



SUSIE BURRELL'S LIST OF SUITABLE SNACKS FOR KIDS

- Flavoured milk
- Cheese and cracker snack packs
- Nut-based low-GI muesli bars
- Dairy snacks (like the dairy desserts)
- Low-fat ice creams (because they're quite low in calories, kids like to eat them and they taste good.)
- Corn thins or mountain bread with spread
- Popcorn
- Cracker packs with dips
- Hot chocolate packs to which you can add water
- Mini-pizza on mountain bread with a bit of cheese and ham



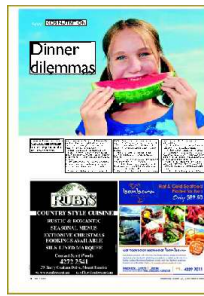
MILENA KATZ'S TIPS FOR CHILD NUTRITION

AGES 0-4: Avoid giving them too much juice, or breads and pastas. Focus on boosting their protein and iron levels by ensuring they eat enough fish, chicken and red meat. Give them a variety of vegetables.

AGES 5-10: Focus on them eating vegetables. While they should be readily eating meats by now, they will still need encouragement to consume a variety of vegetables.

AGES 10+: They should have formed some good eating habits by now. Continue to focus on vegetables, meats and dairy, but ensure they understand why it is important to eat those foods.





Chicken and cucumber rice paper rolls

Author: Lynne Mullins

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 Lebanese cucumber
- 1 medium carrot, peeled
- 24 square (17cm) or small round rice paper sheets
- 1-2 chicken breast fillets (depending on size), steamed and sliced into sticks
- 1 cup bean shoots
- 24 mint leaves
- hoisin sauce, to serve

METHOD

1. Cut cucumber and carrot into 6cm sticks.
2. Place one sheet of rice paper in a bowl

- of warm water until just softened. Remove and place on a tea towel.
 3. Place a piece of chicken in the centre of the rice paper, top with a stick each of cucumber and carrot, two or three bean shoots and two mint leaves, fold over and roll rice paper to enclose filling.
 4. Repeat with remaining rice paper sheets and fillings.
- Serve with hoisin sauce.

Makes 24.

Common mistakes

- Giving children too much choice and not limiting their food options.
- Over-relying on pastas or breads at dinner time and forgetting the importance of meat.
- Speaking about vegetables in a negative way.
- Not experimenting with vegetables enough. (Parents should eat different vegetables and try to cook and present them in various ways.)
- Allowing children to have too much sodium in their diet.
- Giving children too many pre-packaged snacks instead of fresh food.

Fruit yoghurt icy poles

Chef: Jane and Jeremy Strode

INGREDIENTS:

- 100g strawberries, hulled and washed
- ¾ cup sugar
- 1 cup water
- 650g yoghurt
- 100g banana
- 1 tspn honey

METHOD

1. Bring sugar and water to the boil. Cool and blend with the yoghurt.
2. Divide mix into two. Add banana and honey to one half and strawberries to the other.
3. Blend each with a bar or stick blender until smooth. Pour into icy-pole moulds and freeze overnight.

Makes 16 x 75ml capacity icy poles.

