

MINDFUL MUNCHERS

## Families Toolkit Volume 2

*New strategies for healthy homes, picky eaters, and food conversations.*

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### About This Toolkit

This is the second Families Toolkit from Mindful Munchers. Volume 1 covered the basics: stocking your kitchen, meal planning, and talking to kids about food. This volume goes deeper: picky eaters, grocery shopping strategies, navigating takeout, and building food confidence in your kids.

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### Dealing with Picky Eaters

Picky eating is one of the most common challenges families face. Here's what the research says actually works:

#### The Exposure Rule

Children often need to be exposed to a new food 10-15 times before accepting it. Don't give up after one or two rejections. Keep offering (without pressure) and taste preferences will gradually expand.

#### Strategies That Work

- Involve kids in cooking: Children who help prepare food are significantly more likely to try and enjoy it
- Serve new foods alongside accepted favorites. Don't make new food the entire meal
- Never force eating. Pressure creates negative associations with food that can last for years
- Offer choices within healthy options: 'Do you want broccoli or carrots tonight?' gives control without giving veto power
- Model eating: Children eat what they see adults eating. If you eat vegetables with enthusiasm, they notice
- Make it fun: Dips (hummus, guacamole, yogurt) dramatically increase vegetable acceptance in kids

#### What Doesn't Work

- Bribing with dessert ('eat your vegetables and you can have ice cream') creates negative associations with vegetables and elevates dessert status

- Hiding vegetables doesn't build actual food acceptance or preferences
- Commenting repeatedly on what a child eats or doesn't eat increases anxiety around food

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## Smarter Grocery Shopping

How you shop shapes what your family eats. These strategies make healthy choices easier and cheaper.

### Before You Go

- Plan 4-5 dinners for the week before shopping. This reduces impulse buys by 30-40%
- Eat before you shop. Hungry shoppers spend more and buy more junk food
- Check your pantry first. Most families already have more than they realize
- Make a list and stick to it, but leave room for whatever produce is on sale

### In the Store

- Shop the perimeter first: fresh produce, meat, dairy, and eggs are usually around the edges
- Compare unit prices, not package prices. Bigger isn't always cheaper per ounce
- Buy frozen vegetables. They're as nutritious as fresh and far less likely to go to waste
- Avoid shopping with hungry kids when possible, or give them a job (finding items, comparing prices)
- Store brands are almost always identical in nutrition to name brands at lower prices

## Produce Cheat Sheet

| Buy Fresh    | Buy Frozen (same nutrition, cheaper) |
|--------------|--------------------------------------|
| Bananas      | Berries                              |
| Apples       | Mango and tropical fruits            |
| Carrots      | Broccoli, spinach, peas              |
| Avocados     | Corn                                 |
| Bell peppers | Edamame                              |
| Tomatoes     | Mixed vegetables                     |

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## Navigating Takeout and Restaurants

Takeout is part of family life, and it doesn't have to be unhealthy. Here's how to make better choices without giving it up.

### Ordering Smarter

- Default to water or unsweetened drinks, saving 200-400 empty calories per person
- Order a side salad or vegetable first. It fills some hunger before the main arrives
- Choose grilled, baked, or steamed over fried when available
- Ask for sauces on the side (most restaurant sauces are very high in sugar and sodium)
- Split large portions or box half immediately. Restaurant portions are often 2-3x a standard serving

### Better Takeout Choices by Cuisine

| Cuisine | Smarter Order                                                |
|---------|--------------------------------------------------------------|
| Mexican | Bean burrito or taco bowl with extra veggies; skip the chips |
| Chinese | Steamed dumplings or stir-fry; brown rice; skip fried rice   |
| Pizza   | Thin crust with vegetable toppings; limit to 2 slices        |
| Burgers | Skip the fries; add a side salad; choose a smaller size      |
| Indian  | Dal or lentil dishes; raita; whole wheat naan                |
| Sushi   | Sashimi or rolls with avocado; miso soup; edamame            |

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## Building Food Confidence in Your Kids

The goal of family nutrition isn't just healthier meals. It's raising kids to have a positive, confident relationship with food for life. Here's how:

### **Teach cooking, not rules.**

Kids who know how to cook are more nutritionally independent, more adventurous eaters, and have better diets as adults. Start simple: scrambled eggs, pasta, stir-fry. Skills matter more than restrictions.

- Talk about where food comes from. Visit a farmers market, grow herbs on a windowsill
- Let kids choose a new fruit or vegetable to try each grocery trip
- Celebrate trying new foods, not just liking them
- Avoid 'clean plate' rules. Teach hunger and fullness awareness instead
- Make cooking a fun weekend activity, not a chore

### **Monthly Family Healthy Habits Check-In**

- What new food did we try this month?
- What meal did we enjoy most together?
- Did we manage to cook at home most nights this week?
- Are we drinking enough water as a family?
- Is everyone getting enough sleep?
- What's one thing we want to do better next month?

For more family resources including recipes and meal planning tips, visit [mindfulmunchers.org](http://mindfulmunchers.org)!