

LIGHTER
BRIGHTER!
you.

40 TIPS AND TRICKS TO **ENTICE PICKY YOUNG EATERS**



**The Incredible
Journey**

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INTRODUCTION

Many parents are advised by their doctors, nutritionists, and family and friends to ignore their child's food fussiness and that it will go away with age.

There are many reasons for these issues, and knowing which category your child fits into can help you manage the challenge.

Keep in mind, that up to 20% of kids are defined as being picky eaters, and this can persist until the age of eight in about a third of them. Some children do carry this trait into adolescence and adulthood though.

It is interesting to note that children who are very picky about what they eat and who have no physical disability in chewing and swallowing start this fussiness at about age two. The exact age they realise they can say 'NO!'

They quickly learn that food is a hot emotional topic, where they get a response very quickly, and closing their mouths to specific foods receives a huge response. They have discovered an area of limitless power where they can get their parents to cajole, beg, bribe, and even cry, all in an attempt to prompt them to eat what they can say 'No!' to.

Unfortunately, being a picky eater can lead to malnutrition and further fussiness, which leads to increased malnutrition. You get the picture.

It is, therefore, essential to ascertain the actual problem so that you can increase the nutrients your child is consuming and optimise their brain (and physical) development.



THE AIM OF THIS REPORT

is to help you get your picky eater to be more adventurous with healthy foods and become more consistent in providing better food choices for your children. You never have to be forceful, but you must be committed to consistency.



DO NOT IGNORE YOUR PICKY EATER'S FUSSINESS

Unfortunately, there is research to indicate that early feeding problems can influence cognitive development, with verbal scores especially being lower in those that were picky eaters. Because twins were used in this research, the influence of genes was controlled, so we know that the lack of nutrients was likely responsible for the differences in verbal scores and aptitude.

BUT FIRST, IS YOUR CHILD A PICKY EATER?

Ask yourself the following questions to find out if your child is a picky eater:

- Does your child favour processed foods, like white bread, processed breakfast cereals, pasta, potato chips, crackers, biscuits and lollies and starchy foods like white potatoes?
- Does your child look healthy or unhealthy?
- Does your child spend much time outdoors, playing and being physically active, or do they lack the energy for normal childhood activities?
- Does your child tend to be moody and emotional, quickly becoming sensitive about something even when it's unnecessary?
- Is your child very particular about how foods smell, taste or feel like and their texture?
- Does your child insist on foods being kept separate on their plate, ie. the meat must not touch the potatoes, and the vegetables must be on their own too, etc?
- Does your child complain that various vegetables are mixed, for example, in a vegetable soup or a salad?
- Do you sometimes dread mealtimes because you have to negotiate about the food they will or won't eat?
- Do you make more than one meal at any time to satisfy one or more of your children?
- Have you given up trying to guide your child in their food choices and instead allow them to choose what they want to eat?

If you answered yes to more than three of these questions, you have a picky eater on your hands. The rest of this report will help you to examine the issue in greater detail, manage their pickiness and stay sane so you can enjoy the resulting changes.

Although we are bombarded with ideas about how to feed our children well, and how vital lifelong good eating habits are, no one tells us ‘how’ to do this!

After nearly two decades of feeding my children the best food I could find, ensuring it was prepared healthily and that it tasted and looked good, I feel compelled to help other parents who may be starting out.

THE EXPERTS KNOW FOR SURE THAT...

Firstly, we need to set the scene. Here are some of the facts that researchers know for sure about how we feed our children, how we introduce foods to them, and some pointers on improving their diet quality.

Some of them may surprise you, and some of them, you’ll say, ‘of course!’ Either way, they are all great reminders of why we should take care of what we feed our children and how to do so with more ease and less struggle:

- What you and other caregivers feed your children largely determines their health, food preferences, and dietary habits FOR LIFE.
- As a mother or father, you prepare about 18,564 meals for your child up until they are 17; if you breastfed your child, you can remove 1,092 for their first year of life. That leaves you with 17,472 meals, and adding one snack a day, at 6,188 in 17 years, you end up with a total of 22,664 meals you are in charge of, even if you eat some of them in other homes or restaurants.
- When parents ensure that healthy food is always available and served in a positive, relaxed manner, children will be exposed to all the right ingredients to foster good food choices and habits.
- Giving your child too much fruit juice is linked to weight gain, so always dilute juice with



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water until you have 50% juice with 50% water. Then slowly start introducing plain water until your child becomes used to drinking what nature intended us to drink. The fibre in real fruit is preferable to the extracted juice, so you can also give a piece of fruit to your child, instead of the juice, to start weaning them off the concentrated sweetness of fruit juices.

- Child-care and family settings are important social environments that help develop food-related behaviours among young children. The consumption of healthy food, by children, is influenced by availability, variety and repeated exposure to these foods. If healthy choices are available and consistently offered, children can choose and become more comfortable trying new and more nutritious foods over time.

- Don't keep junk food in your home. In their own homes, foods that are withheld from children become more alluring to them, so your child will want them more, even if they are only brought out on rare occasions. Based on the same principle, don't eat a food that you won't let them eat. If you don't keep junk food at home, they will never associate it with home – this is good for them. It also reduces any battles that may arise if there is a 'bad food' cupboard or drawer.

- Regular family meals during adolescence, in particular, seem to have a very positive effect on physical health and psychological well-being and may also have a protective association with preventing substance abuse, especially among adolescent girls, research suggests.

- The amount of food served to children will impact how much they eat. Portion size is learned.

- You may not be happy to hear this if you are the primary purchaser and producer of food in your family: the person in the family that buys, prepares

and serves the food to the family controls 72% of what the family will eat – both inside and outside the home! Now, instead of allowing this fact to make you feel guilty if your children are not eating as well as you would like them to, allow it to make you feel powerful! After all, if you have that much power, you can now use it for good!

- Researchers have found that convenient access to large portions of nutrient-deficient, calorie-rich, and tasty foods may contribute to eating more and weight gain among children.
- Young children don't always like their food mixed up on their plates. Research suggests that separating the various items on their plates can increase their consumption if they are picky eaters.
- Some research has indicated that better-nourished children are more active, show more leadership ability, are less anxious, and are happier than poorly-nourished children.
- There are various psychological factors that influence children's food choices, such as parents' own food choices and their approach to new foods, their ability to set limits on treats and their ability to work together as a team in educating their children about healthy food choices. Often children's refusal to eat the food their parents offer is a symptom of other aspects of family dysfunction and dynamics. Therefore, a positive family environment is essential for improving children's diet quality.
- The taste for sugar is acquired through eating sweeter and sweeter foods. It can therefore be lost by gradually decreasing sugar levels in foods and beverages. It may take some time but can be accomplished by consistent effort.



*YOUNG CHILDREN
DON'T ALWAYS
LIKE THEIR FOOD
MIXED UP ON
THEIR PLATES.*

- Breakfast is an important meal, as research has indicated time and again, especially for school-age children who use a lot of brain nutrients to stay focused and concentrate for long periods during the school day. Ensure that there is always time for breakfast, or if your children commute to school over a long distance, make sure they take their breakfast with them.
- Children develop tastes based mainly on the food available most frequently, so you can also sneak some carrots into muffins or zucchini into homemade bread. Add dried fruit to muffins or fruit bread. Smoothies, juices, and vegetable sauces are great places to sneak in fruit or vegetables. However, don't do this without also exposing your children to the real thing - they will never learn to enjoy fresh produce if you keep fooling them.
- You may have to offer your child new food up to ten times before they try it - don't give up! Research has indicated that the earlier a child is exposed to a broad range of foods, the healthier the child's diet becomes. Giving your child repeated opportunities to try new foods increases liking and eatings.
- Recent research has shown that most children prefer their meals on the lower part of their plate, with their food being presented in a pattern or design. Whereas adults prefer three types of foods and colours on their plates, children prefer seven types of food and six colours.
- Children are more likely to eat in an emotionally positive situation. Make mealtimes pleasant and enjoyable, and your children will be relaxed and calm, and more likely to try some new foods.
- In some studies, when children are given vegetables as their first course, their vegetable intake increased. When the portion size was doubled, they also tended to eat more of vegetables.



• Metabolic syndrome - a pre-diabetic state - has its roots in childhood (30 - 50% of overweight children have symptoms of this syndrome.) This syndrome influences cognitive health negatively.

• A daily multivitamin and mineral formula is good insurance for your child's health. Some days, their nutritional choices will leave them without all the essential nutrients they need to grow and develop optimally. A supplement is the safety net.



YOUR FOOD 'MANTRA'

If friends and family members do not support your decision to feed your children well, a simple, rehearsed 'speech' may be helpful.

Here's an example:

Many people are on different paths to improve their lives. I have chosen the path of food to help my children live long, healthy, happy lives. I've researched how bad, many processed foods are and feel compelled to follow my instincts. I'd like you to know that if you felt very strongly about something, I'd support your decision and respect it, even if I disagree. I hope you'll help my children to respect me and my decision about what I'd like them to be fed, by not undermining me. You may think they are being deprived of treats but I think I'm depriving them of poor health, obesity and bad moods. It's tough being a parent - as you know - and your support means the world to me.

HERE ARE SOME MORE POINTERS TO HELP YOU ON THE ADVENTURE AHEAD:

- Your child's initial resistance doesn't mean they will stay resistant, as research has indicated that the more times a child is exposed to a food, the greater the likelihood that they will eventually try it. Anything between 8 and 10 attempts, with some research suggesting it may even take 12 attempts, usually does the trick.
- Children need structure and limits from their parents concerning their eating habits - no different from all the other aspects of bringing children up well.
- Allow older children to choose recipes from cookbooks or magazines - even younger children will be keen to do this. For very young children, a photograph could appeal to them.
- Never use food as a punishment or a reward. Food has to be separated from emotions. When you give your child a treat after a fall or a lolly after a scary experience, you teach them that food can be used to make them feel better. This is not a good lesson for them to learn. Similarly, if eating the salad gets them the cake, they see salad as bad and cake as good. Another bad lesson!
- Neon green, green, arctic blue and shocking pink lollies/candy should be removed from your pantry. Although these are not natural food colours,

their brightness appeals to young children. It is best to start adding naturally bright foods, like watermelon, sweet potato, dragon fruit or kiwi fruit.

Too many changes attempted too quickly will fail – it is one of the reasons that New Year resolutions fail. You'll exhaust yourself and could get a knee-jerk reaction, especially with older children. Fewer changes to deal with lead to a greater chance that the ones being attempted will 'stick.' So, going slowly means that the new habits will become consolidated and part of the standard way of eating and living without completely throwing the family routine out and antagonising anyone. Going slowly, and incorporating each new idea and strategy means that the child (and the rest of the family) gets a chance to feel comfortable with thinking about the new behaviour, avoiding impulsive, knee-jerk responses. Using a sense of humour and trying to make it fun can also help the transition go more smoothly.

- If they want a snack, try getting them into the habit of snacking on raw foods between meals, which will re-train their processed food/ junk food tooth.

- 'Choose your battles' is a vital parenting lesson relevant to feeding your child. Should your child hate brussels sprouts, don't force them to eat them! Cabbage, broccoli and cauliflower are all great substitutes (and easier to disguise in other foods too!). My son hates pumpkin, in any form, so I replace any pumpkin dishes with carrots or sweet potato (kumara) as they are also full of beta-carotene. He also hates zucchini when it's cooked, so I grate some of it into salads, and he's okay with that. Find the healthy foods they love to eat, and focus on them, regularly adding new varieties. In this

ALLOW OLDER CHILDREN TO CHOOSE RECIPES FROM COOKBOOKS OR MAGAZINES - EVEN YOUNGER CHILDREN WILL BE KEEN TO DO THIS.





way, your meals can be less about forcing a food to be eaten and more about the different varieties they DO like!

- Don't throw everything from the pantry out. Choose which food or snack you plan to eliminate, such as sodas, and replace them with fresh juice. Or, you can take the approach that you have discovered that certain foods will stop the child's brain from growing properly, and therefore you want to try some alternatives. Whichever option you choose, please DO NOT make a big deal of changing their diet. Everyone likes the status quo, and no one likes change, so tiny changes slowly become big changes! Read about what happened when one Mum took my presentation to heart too quickly:

'I was so excited after listening to Delia talk about how important food was to my children's thinking, memory and brain development that I left the lecture and went straight home to my pantry. When my family came home that afternoon there was a pile of food that was leaving our home. Well, it was a disaster! They were crying and quite overwhelmed about the thought of never being able to eat those junky foods again. I discussed it with Delia later and she advised me to go slowly but consistently, and not tell them what I was doing initially. The results have been wonderful, but that first day was a real catastrophe.' Vesna W. New South Wales, Australia.

- By simply using your busy life and a simple memory lapse as an excuse for why their favourite snack food is no longer in the pantry, you can avoid a confrontation. But, this is critically important: ALWAYS have alternatives. Nobody thrives when they feel deprived, even if you deprive them of poor health; they don't understand this initially!

- Don't reward eating vegetables with dessert. If your child is used to this, then dip some fresh fruit into a yummy sauce (tahini mixed with maple or coconut syrup is a great, caramelly treat to dip crisp and crunchy apples or pears into).

- If, over time, you only make the kinds of foods that you know are healthy available in your kitchen, your children do not have a choice. If they are really hungry, they will eat the food on offer. If they are not, they will pass. You may find they have re-discovered their appetite when the next mealtime arrives. After a few days, you and your child may find that hunger wins.

- Sit down with your child and make some rules regarding their media habits if they habitually, watch television and eat. Changing entrenched habits is not going to be easy, but it is worth it as this bad habit has long-reaching effects across their lifetime.

- Focus on what you can control, making peace with the fact that your children will benefit from eating right when they are with you.

- Be kind to yourself - pioneers always have a more challenging time than those following the crowd.

- Before taking away their favourite, low-nutrient foods, find some new, healthier versions of these foods that they enjoy eating. This makes phasing out the poor choices much easier.

- Get them to play with some new foods, feeling the different textures of different types of food. They may feel less threatened by the food when they have a full sensory experience before putting it into their mouths.

- Provide food that you know they like, together with new, unfamiliar food. They then get to enjoy one of the foods and experiment with the new one.

- Introduce a 'one bite rule', an eating 'policy' that the child agrees to, whereby they get to choose between two new foods and take one bite of the food, chew it, and (hopefully) like it. They do this with the same food for ten days, when you then give them another choice between two new foods. Choose foods similar in texture to what they are used to and remain

calm and happy while they try the food. Do not get into any fights about this strategy but stay consistent.

- Blend the sauces you make and use, such as those that include onions and tomatoes, as the chunks of food may distress the child.

- Offer a reward system for younger children, such as a trip to a particular park if they try a new food each day for a week.



- Find out your child's favourite taste and texture preference, i.e. do they prefer crunchy, soft or smooth textures? Even what their preferred temperature of food is. When you know what they prefer, you can make a point of including that texture in most meals, providing positive reinforcement for sharing their preferences, and allowing you to experiment with different ways of preparing foods they don't like, using their texture or taste preference as a guide.

- Research has shown that calling foods interesting names will increase your child's consumption of these foods, for example, 'emerald dragon bites' vs green beans.

- Eat the food yourself. Youngsters learn from their caregivers about what foods are safe, so if you are eating it, then it is safe for them to try too. Before they try it, you may even tell your child what the new food tastes like to help them imagine it, such as salty, sour, sweet, etc.

- If they want to lick a new food without putting it in their mouth, let them do this.

- Try a new food when you know they are hungry, such as at a regular snack or mealtime. This means they'll be hungrier at dinner time too, if they didn't eat the snack, which gives you another opportunity to try another new food.

- Remain calm but persistent about introducing new foods regularly. If they are used to you being emotional and distressed about their food choices, you may have to walk away or take a deep breath if you feel those old feelings resurfacing.
- Mix sugar-laden breakfast cereals with low or no-sugar varieties. This is simple to do if you search for a similar-looking cereal and mix it with the one that you are trying to 'wean' them off. Slowly increase the good cereal while reducing the bad one, and soon they will eat only the good one and have forgotten all about the one that wasn't good for them.
- Try to keep food fun: for example, give them 'pink' potatoes, which are simply regular mashed potatoes with cooked beetroot stirred through them. You can try this with peas, but only if they are over the hurdle of eating green foods.
- If your child is naturally anxious, trying new foods will increase their anxiety. Adding a magnesium supplement to their daily diet will reduce anxiety naturally and may help them feel less stressed about the new foods being added to their diet. Adding 50mg of magnesium glycinate at breakfast can be a simple and very effective way to help them feel calm.





PICKY EATERS MAY SUFFER FROM SPECIFIC MEDICAL CHALLENGES

NEOPHOBIA is the medical term used to describe the avoidance of novel (new) foods. Researchers believe this challenging problem was useful in our ancient past, when new foods could have been dangerous to us, and we had to try them cautiously. Today it only irritates most parents, as they supply nutritious foods that their children eye suspiciously. Although this condition has a genetic component, environmental factors, such as repeatedly exposing the child to new foods, will reduce this challenging problem significantly. Children outgrow this phobia, so continue offering new foods, regularly, to entice them to try the new taste and textures. Picky eaters, in contrast, avoid new foods and foods that are known to them but disliked.

CHILDREN DO SEEM TO OUTGROW THIS PHOBIA, SO CONTINUE OFFERING NEW FOODS REGULARLY, TO ENTICE THEM TO TRY THE NEW TASTE AND TEXTURE.

SENSORY PROCESSING DISORDER (SPD) OR SENSORY INTEGRATION DYSFUNCTION

(SID) are terms used to explain difficulties with processing and integrating sensory stimuli, such as touch, smell, taste, movement and sound. It is termed a neurological disorder, which the child can grow out of, as their central nervous system develops and their senses become more integrated. In young children, until their senses have fully developed, taste and smell dysfunctions can interfere with their normal taste development. This can lead to pickiness about new foods and even difficulties swallowing.

They may either be very sensitive to new tastes and textures, have difficulty chewing, or hate the dentist. Or, focus on tasting and licking everything

they can put in their mouths, enjoying intensely flavoured foods and will chew on pens, clothes etc.

Either way, their pickiness about foods may stem from the lack of integration of their senses or may be due to other reasons, which are discussed further on. However, all children grow and develop at different rates, so they may quickly grow out of these sensory challenges but be left with poor eating habits.

SELECTIVE EATING DISORDER (SED) is an under-researched eating disorder that seems to prevent the sufferer from consuming specific foods, leading to eating a very select group of foods. It is thought to be linked to SPD, as certain tastes and textures may not appeal due to sensory immaturity or dysfunction. As it is associated with an aversion to trying new foods too, it may therefore be linked to neophobia. It is also linked to Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD), coeliac disease, and allergies to specific foods. It is, therefore, essential to get your child's digestive health assessed, as well as checking for other signs of OCD and treat for that.

FOOD AVOIDANCE EMOTIONAL DISORDER (FAED) is a childhood avoidance of food brought on by emotional difficulties and stress. Suppose your child suddenly became very picky about the foods they would eat or started avoiding foods after an emotional shock or bad experience with a particular food. In that case, this may be worth investigating with a professional therapist.

DYSPHAGIA is the medical term used to describe difficulty with swallowing. It is more common in older adults, but some children seem to suffer from this disorder. It may be due to a physical problem, such as facial nerve/s and muscle/s dysfunction, a tumour or mass in the throat, large or inflamed tonsils or tongue, and/or dental problems.

Have these factors assessed before looking for other solutions if your child seems to have trouble swallowing their food. However, remember that they may appear to be having difficulty swallowing when the taste and texture of the food simply repulses them.

PHAGOPHOBIA is the fear of swallowing and has to be dealt with by an experienced paediatrician or feeding therapist.

Various gastrointestinal problems have also been linked to unusual eating habits, so checking your child's digestive health is highly recommended.



REAL PICKINESS OR A POSSIBLE PHYSICAL CHALLENGE?

You are therefore left to make some conclusions about your child's picky eating. They either have one of the recognisable disorders mentioned on the previous page, of which the most verifiable one is a physical abnormality with respect to the actual process of chewing and swallowing. You should have this assessed by a physician as soon as possible.

Or, they may have a food allergy or even coeliac disease, especially if they are underweight and not thriving.

However, if they are overweight and can't stand the texture and taste of fresh produce, and they have been eating refined, processed foods for many years, you may have to slowly change their diet so that they get used to real food.

They will not starve – they may be cranky and irritated with you for changing their food, but as time goes by and if you are persistent, following the guidelines in this report, you will wake up one day to find your happy, content child has come back to you.

This may be challenging, but it is possible. The pointers below are helpful to get you over the first hurdles. They apply to both children who are addicted to processed foods and to those that need more healthy food choices in their diet.

FOOD TEXTURE COULD BE A CHALLENGE FOR YOUR CHILD

One of the reasons some children don't like new foods is because the texture bothers them. Some children object to foods that make too much noise when being chewed, such as crunchy carrots. They may not be able to verbalise this concern, so look out for foods that may be 'loud' when eaten to see if this is a consistent problem.

Another texture that sensitive children object to is sliminess or 'mooshiness' as my son calls it. When fresh produce is mushy or slimy, it is generally going off. Our aversion to this texture is nature's way of telling us to avoid eating it.

However, as we get older we learn that the sliminess, for example, inside a fresh tomato isn't going to hurt us, the 'mooshiness' of an avocado isn't going to either, and we get used to these new textures and so get on with eating a variety of different foods.

Manufacturers of processed foods have spent billions of dollars to ensure that the 'mouth feel' of their products is the opposite of slimy or 'mooshy'. This is no mistake.

These smart manufacturers want their customers to love their products instantly, so they know exactly what the texture and taste should offer: crunchy, salty, sweet, and chewy or creamy..

If customers instantly fall in love with these products, they will repurchase them. They can always be trusted to taste the same, so they're reliable in a way that fresh produce can never be.



So, this is the big issue: if your child is used to the taste of processed junk food, their ability to learn to eat and enjoy the natural textures of real food, which include some sliminess, some 'mooshiness' and some lumpiness, they will be at a distinct disadvantage.

They will feel that processed foods, which always taste the

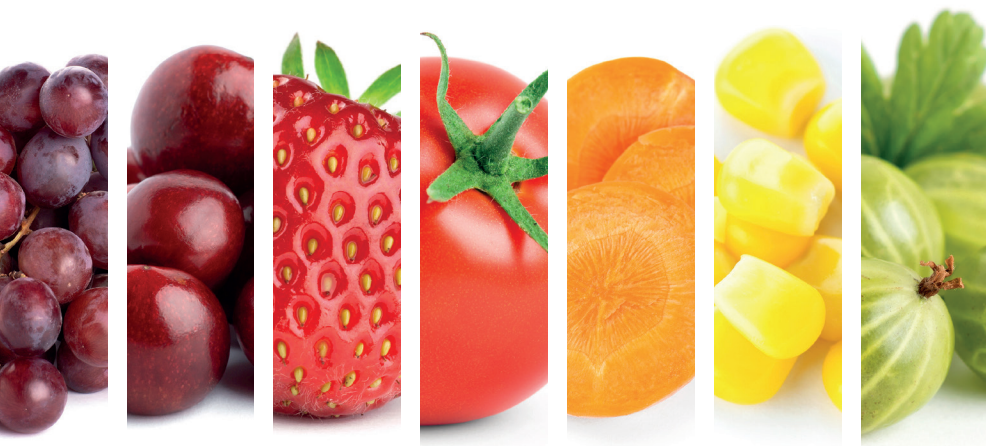
same, are safer than natural produce, which is naturally variable, depending on season, variety, crop and storage conditions. They will find real food unappetising and disgusting – even spitting it out and refusing to try it again.

Conversely, children brought up to eat and enjoy real food are not distressed by the slight sliminess or ‘mooshiness’ of natural foods, while their peers, brought up on processed junk food, can’t stand the texture or taste.

Research investigating what happened to rats brought up on junk food and whose diets were changed to healthier fare discovered a startling fact: the rats went through a period of withdrawal during which they didn’t want to eat the healthy food. However, they started enjoying the real, healthy food after some time.

Remember that high-calorie foods were not a staple in our distant past, and when found (for example, honey), were enjoyed fully, but rarely. And to ensure a reserve of energy for possible future famine. Then the diet went back to normal, low-calorie food.

There was no time for our ancestors’ taste buds to become accustomed to high-calorie, fat and sugar-laden foods, which is very different from the situation today, where this is the staple diet for many children. Keep in mind that our ancestors would have starved if they had avoided eating healthy foods or trying new foods.



ZINC, APPETITE AND PICKINESS

If your child is extremely picky about what they choose to eat, they could have a zinc deficiency. This mineral is involved in ensuring taste buds work correctly, as well as regulating appetite.

Often children with a zinc deficiency enjoy highly flavoured foods because the additives titillate their poorly performing taste buds, which is why normal, natural foods taste less than appealing. So, a spiral of increasing zinc deficiency will occur, as the foods, they tend to favour are deficient in zinc too.

Furthermore, the smell or taste of certain foods can repulse some children deficient in zinc, probably due to a dysfunction of taste buds and smell receptors. Some of these children are much more sensitive to ordinary smells and tastes than those not zinc deficient.

It's as if they are super sensitive to taste and smell, which negatively influences how they experience the whole sensory impression and experience accompanying eating.

It is very simple to have their zinc status checked and improve their appetite and their ability to enjoy normal foods via their taste buds and nose.

A good health food store will have a zinc status test available, and you can either perform the test in-store with your child or take the test home with you. The test involves the child tasting the specific liquid and noting their response.



If the child notices no taste when one teaspoon is swirled around in their mouth, they have a zinc deficiency. Inadequate levels will result in them not tasting the liquid initially, but after a few seconds, their mouth will feel dry, metallic or furry. Moderate zinc levels will result in a definite strong unpleasant taste after a second or so, and optimal zinc levels will result in an immediate, unpleasant solid taste being noted.



This report will have alerted you to possible physical reason/s for your child's picky eating or to the fact that it's simply due to a combination of factors and can be dealt with when you apply some creativity, persistence, and being a good role model.

Here's to you soon enjoying healthier, more nutrient-dense and varied meals with your whole family!



HOT CHOCOLATE

Serves 2 – 3

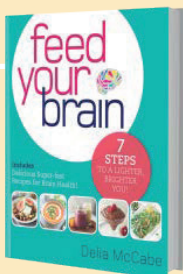
You'll be surprised at how simple this decadent hot chocolate is to make. It's also a meal in itself!

- 4 tablespoons sugar-free cocoa, raw cacao or carob powder
- ¼ cup cashew nuts or macadamia nuts
- 2 cups warmed coconut milk
- 3 large medjool dates, pitted
- ½ teaspoon pure vanilla essence (vanilla extract)
- ground cinnamon or nutmeg
- raw cacao nibs

Add the cocoa, nuts, coconut milk, dates and vanilla to a blender and mix until smooth and thick. If you have a high-speed blender, the mixture will heat up nicely if you blend it for an extra minute. Otherwise, pour the mixture into a small saucepan, place it over a low heat and stir until hot. Pour the hot chocolate into mugs and sprinkle with cinnamon and raw cacao nibs. Serve immediately.

Variation:

If you want to transform this hot chocolate into a cold treat, simply use ice-cold coconut milk instead, and replace one of the cups of milk with ice cubes.



Excerpt from
*'Feed Your Brain:
7 Steps to a Lighter
Brighter You!'*
by Delia McCabe



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Delia McCabe, shifted her focus from conventional talking therapy, after completing her Masters in Psychology. Delia immersed herself in the fascinating world of nutritional neuroscience and offers a focused, insightful, evidence-based approach into how specific foods can improve our mood, concentration, memory and learning ability and help us manage stress and remain calm and happy in our busy, stressful world, regardless of our age!

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