

CHASING AWAY Your Child's



BEIGE DIET BLUES

Does your child primarily eat foods on “the beige diet”? The beige diet includes mostly non-fruit, non-vegetable carbohydrates, such as pizza, breaded chicken nuggets, cookies, crackers, pasta, chips, and pretzels. (And, despite technically being a vegetable, French fries are definitely part of the beige diet.) It is called “the beige diet” because the majority of the foods included in it are beige in color—and low on nutrients.

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The beige diet is unhealthy because foods like these do not have the variety of nutrition that children need to feel and function well. Additionally, kids tend to get hooked on beige foods. These types of carbohydrates can make people feel good temporarily. However, they can ultimately leave your child feeling sad, tired, anxious, hypersensitive, or hyperactive.

Children who eat a beige diet are often considered “picky eaters” because they only eat a limited number of foods. Some kids are “grazers” and are very thin. Some are obese. If your child currently eats a beige diet, it’s time to switch him over to eating more varied and nutritious foods. Here are some tips for you.

1: LET GO OF THE GUILT

First, you need to stop taking all of the responsibility for your child’s diet, as it is a 50-50 proposition. Yes, you are responsible for what you serve your child, but your child is responsible for what he or she eats. Feeling guilty about what your child eats (or does not eat) only complicates the problem.

Give yourself a break. We live in a society where many

people eat large quantities of beige foods. Just look at the center aisles of the grocery store, which are filled with beige foods. This is not an excuse to continue eating this way, but it does help us understand the problem. And, understanding is a crucial starting point!

2: BE A FOOD DETECTIVE

You are not alone in this process. Eating is a family matter. So, your family can become a team of food detectives. As part of your detective work, have your family members write down or find pictures of what they eat. As the saying goes, pictures can be worth a thousand words. This activity will help you and your family begin to talk about food. You may discover that your child is not the only one who eats beige foods. Perhaps your family menu consists of more beige foods than you originally thought.

During the “food detective” process, discuss the characteristics of the foods your family eats. Describing food (what it looks like, smells like, tastes like, and feels like) is a powerful language development activity for children. This activity can increase your child’s

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food IQ, as well as start the discussion about expanding your family’s food repertoire to include healthier choices.

There are many Web sites with good nutrition information to help you and your family as you do your detective work (eg, www.facebook.com/FoodSmartKids). So, make it fun and creative. You and your kids are more likely to participate if the activity is gamelike and no one is feeling pressured.

3: CREATE AND IMPLEMENT A FUN FAMILY MEAL PLAN

As my husband always says, “Fail to plan; plan to fail.” We live in a busy world, and this is



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the foods on your list (another terrific opportunity for them to develop language). By including your children in the shopping process, you are now increasing their net family worth and their percentage of participation in this crucial family activity. You can

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After doing your detective work and finding out what your family eats, create a new meal plan, and involve the entire family. Write a weekly grocery list together. The list can be compiled in words or pictures (for younger children). Computers provide a world of images at our fingertips! Plan (as a family) what you will eat for your meals throughout the week (with some flexibility built in for changes to your family's schedule).

Then, go shopping! Many children like to shop, because it makes them feel "grown up." Grocery shopping is a great time to talk to your kids about

even save time by shopping the outside aisles of the grocery store, where fruits, vegetables, and many proteins are located.

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4: LET'S GET COOKING

Fortunately, there is a renewed interest in food preparation and cooking in our society. Just look at the popularity of the Food Network and cooking classes within your community. There are even cooking classes for kids!

There are many, many children's cookbooks and recipes available for different age groups and interest levels. Locate these on the Internet and have your child pick out a cookbook or Web site he or she especially likes (eg, www.mealmakeovermoms.com). Then have him or her pick out a new recipe or two each week for the family to make. Don't be intimidated. These are children's recipes and won't have too many ingredients.

Then, involve your child in the food preparation process as much as possible (keeping safety in mind). We are all



more likely to eat (or at least try) what we make with our own hands.

In addition to making foods for family meals, if you like, you and your child can create foods similar to those on the beige diet—but with much more nutritional value. You can bake breads, muffins, and cookies by using whole grains, fruits, and vegetables (eg, oats, bananas, zucchini, and pumpkin). You can even make your own fruit pops for snacks! All you need is fruit (and other healthy ingredients if desired), a blender, and Pop-sicle molds.

5. BE EASY ON YOURSELF AND YOUR CHILD

Go slowly as you expand and improve your family's diet. When you add or change foods in their diet, it may take 10 to 15 samplings to begin to enjoy some new food tastes, smells, and textures. Habits take time to change, so make one small dietary change at a time. Small changes lead to bigger ones (such as sampling a bite of a food not tasted before, then taking two bites, and so on). It takes a long time to raise a child, so you have time to make these changes.

So, now you know some steps to chase away your child's "beige diet blues." This process can be interesting and fun! And, with a little planning, you can easily fit these tips into your busy family schedule. Happy eating! ♦

Some parent resources:

- ✦ "Dancing in the Kitchen" by Melanie Potock and Joan Langford (*Creative Child Magazine's* 2012 CD of the Year)
- ✦ *Happy Mealtimes with Happy Kids: How to Teach Your Child about the Joy of Food* by Melanie Potock (*Creative Child Magazine's* 2012 Parenting Book of the Year)
- ✦ *Just Take a Bite: Easy, Effective Answers to Food Aversions and Eating Challenges* by Lori Ernsperger and Tania Stegen-Hanson

- ✦ *Nobody Told Me (or My Mother) That! Everything from Bottles and Breathing to Healthy Speech Development* by Diane Bahr (*Creative Child Magazine's* 2010 Top Choice of the Year Award)

Diane Bahr is a certified speech-language pathologist and infant massage instructor. She has practiced speech-language pathology since 1980 and feeding therapy since 1983. She is the author of the award-winning book Nobody Told Me (or My Mother) That! Everything from Bottles and Breathing to Healthy Speech Development. For more information, visit her Web site at www.agesandstages.net.

