Help your youngster choose to be less choosy about food! Consider these strategies to add variety to his diet.

**Pass dishes around**
Rather than putting bowls in the middle of the dinner table, pass each one from person to person. When a dish is passed to your child, the aroma may tempt him to try it. Or he might be more likely to serve himself a little just because it’s in his hands. If not, at least he’ll see others take the food. And over time, his curiosity may get the better of him.

**Use a “food chain”**
Slowly offer your youngster a series of foods that build on ones he already enjoys. Say he loves boxed macaroni and cheese. Start by replacing the powdered cheese with the real thing (1–2 cups grated cheddar). The next time, add pureed butternut squash or broccoli to the mac ‘n’ cheese. Finally, serve just the pureed squash or broccoli.

**Try, try again**
Your child won’t touch steamed green beans? Offer raw green beans with a yogurt-dill dip. Eggplant a no-go? Make it into “fries.” (Cut a 1-pound eggplant into strips 1–2 inch wide, and toss with 1–2 tsp. salt. Dip the pieces into 1 whisked egg white, then in breadcrumbs, and roast at 425° for 15 minutes.) In other words, try different ways of preparing foods, and eventually you’ll hit on ones your youngster enjoys.

**Solutions for picky eating**

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**Festivals of food**
Explore new foods with your child by attending food festivals this spring. Whether they feature peaches or persimmons, crawfish or crepes, strawberries or salmon, these events showcase interesting foods from farmers, vendors, or restaurants. Look for ones with free admission—and enjoy the free samples!

**Spring cleaning**
With winter in the rearview mirror, April is a good time for active spring cleaning. Together, list indoor and outdoor tasks that will get everyone moving. For instance, your youngster might work with you to wash windows or move winter coats into storage. Outdoors, he could sweep porches or clear sticks from the yard.

**DID YOU KNOW?**
Three types of fitness are important for children (and adults): endurance, strength, and flexibility. Encourage your child to develop all three with a variety of activities. Aerobic sports like soccer or swimming will help improve endurance. Sit-ups and push-ups can build strength. And dancing, gymnastics, and yoga all promote flexibility.

**Just for fun**

**Q:** What kind of flower doesn’t go in a vase?

**A:** Cauliflower!

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Nutrition Nuggets™

Grow a garden

Get your youngster excited about the joys of gardening—and the fun of eating what she grows—with these suggestions.

Research. Build enthusiasm, and learn the basics, with a visit to the library. Read children's books like Roots, Shoots, Buckets & Boots (Sharon Lovejoy) to find out about everything from seed selection to themed gardens. Your librarian can recommend titles.

Cutting out soda

I recently read an article on childhood obesity that got me worried about how much soda my son Max was drinking. I talked to the school nurse, and she gave me good ideas for cutting back.

First, she suggested that I show Max what's actually in soda. I put a 12-ounce can on the table. Then, I had him measure out 10 tsp. of sugar and said, “That’s how much sugar is in that can of soda.” I asked if he would want to eat all that sugar at once—and boy, did he make a face! So I mentioned he could picture that pile when he wanted soda.

The nurse also said we could simply make soda less available. If we don’t buy it, then he won’t drink it at home. And when we eat out, I give him a choice of water or milk. I know it will take time, but Max is beginning to get used to the change.

Plan. Together, figure out where you could put a garden. You might have room in your yard, opt for pots on a porch, or sign up for a plot in a community garden. Then, visit a nursery to choose seeds or plants. The clerks will help you and your youngster pick vegetables to suit your space and sunlight.

Tend. Your child will get a nice workout by planting and caring for her garden. After she digs and plants, she’ll need to weed and water regularly to help her plants thrive. And, in turn, you can tell her that eating her home-grown veggies will help her grow and thrive, too!

Nutrition Nuggets™ is reviewed by a registered dietitian. Consult a physician before beginning any major change in diet or exercise.

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O U R  P U R P O S E

To provide busy parents with practical ways to promote healthy nutrition and physical activity for their children.

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