

# **THE PARENT NOTEBOOK**

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the TASTE Bud**



# Changing the Taste of the Taste Bud

BY MERYL BRANDWEIN

Making it work for your family!

Parents may state from time to time...  
"My child has a great appetite!"  
"She's just a picky eater."  
"My kid favors sweet items."  
"My son enjoys a glass of chocolate milk any day over a glass of water."  
"My daughter does not like vegetables!"

Sound familiar doesn't it? Well, did you know your children like what you've trained them to like? Yes, it's true. Many parents have trained their children to prefer one food over another-- healthy or not. If you are interested in improving your children's diet and gradually moving toward a healthier plate of food, retraining their taste buds is where you ought to begin. A gradual retraining is in order. It won't happen overnight especially if you feed them exactly what you know they will like and eat for dinner. If they are used to sugary cereals or donuts for breakfast and processed meals for dinner, that's what their taste buds know and crave. Taste buds are little sensory organs all over our tongue that allow us to experience tastes that are sweet, salty, sour and bitter.

Did you know that children who are tasting foods for the first time rely on their sensitive taste buds as well as their sense of smell and other visual cues to decide if a food tastes good or not?

Taste is one way in which children experience the world and they are more sensitive to certain tastes than adults. This is mainly because taste is subjective. It is a complex sense that's partly determined by the taste buds, but also affected by a food's

aroma, its appearance and even previous experiences with it or similar foods. So, how do you get your child to eat foods that not only taste good, but are good for them right now?

Prior to the advent of convenient and highly processed foods, children were able to differentiate flavors according to their natural taste. Fruit tastes sweet, butter had a nice mouth-feel and vegetables were crunchy and earthy. And when prepared properly, these foods looked highly appetizing on a plate.

## Fast forward to the age of convenience foods.

Today there are many children who don't know what fresh food really looks or tastes like, only knowing from packaged processed foods. Unfortunately for us (families), food manufacturers understand what flavors and tastes children are most attracted to and design products accordingly. Most of the foods marketed to young children not only look pretty and are appealing to children, but they are full of sugar, processed fats, and empty calories which offer little nutritional value.

These convenience foods tend to be artificially sweetened with high fructose corn syrup and have added unhealthy fats such as partially hydrogenated oils. These manufactured ingredients have tastes and flavors that cannot be matched by Mother Nature. High fructose corn syrup is much sweeter than natural sugar, and hydrogenated fats have a pleasant mouth feel and to a child who eats mostly processed sugar and fats, they will turn their nose up at a strawberry because it just isn't sweet enough.

## Shifting a child's sense of taste

The key is to learn how to retrain your child's taste buds. Get him to eat real food and not food that comes from a box or a package.

Real foods contain vitamins, enzymes, minerals and essential nutrients that a growing body needs for proper development.

*continued on next page*



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## Changing The Taste Bud *continued*

This can occur by reducing the amount of added sugar and fats in their diet to allow their taste buds to slowly accommodate to these new tastes and flavors. Obviously, this transition is not done overnight nor over the course of a week. It requires a gradual process to be successful.

Some ideas to phase in more healthful, less processed foods are:

- Fresh fruits, with plain yogurt, sweetened with a little pure maple syrup. Obviously, this transition is not done overnight nor over the course of a week. It requires a gradual process to be successful.
- Instead of cold sweetened breakfast cereals, serve hot, unsweetened ones, such as plain oatmeal, and add raisins, fresh fruit, sliced almonds or chopped pecans and a sprinkle of cinnamon (which contains no sugar).
- Have them snack on fresh fruit instead of packaged snacks. Pair up protein with the fruit, such as almond butter spread on apple slices.
- Guacamole is a great snack. Serve it with veggies as a dip.
- Make your own trail mix. Use dried fruits (sulfur-free) and nuts, and add some dark chocolate bits for sweetness.
- Make your own baked goods at home and cut the amount of sugar called for in the recipe by half. Really, they won't miss it!

Perhaps the most important decision a child will make is based on what they see you as a parent eating. If you eat real, healthful foods, rich in flavor and color, chances are your children will follow. Additionally, being a role model is as good for your health as it is theirs. Teaching your child the importance of making healthy choices takes patience and effort but the rewards of an energetic and healthy child make it worthwhile. Ultimately they will slowly begin to steer their palettes toward a healthier future.

You have the power to empower your child to LIKE healthy. Retrain your child's taste buds for today, focusing in on reducing sugar and improving other whole food selections. In our next issue, we will share tips on how to transition to whole grains that have more nutritional value.

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