
Ashley Moulton Work Sample

Email course for parents- “Healthy Hacks: Cracking the Code to your Kid’s Eating Habits”

Audience

Parents who would like for their child to eat more healthfully

What this is

An email course I wrote for my company, Nomster Chef. It is a series of 10 hacks, delivered via email over the course of 10 days, with tips to encourage healthy eating in kids.

What I did

Researched the topics and wrote the text for the course. Read academic papers from experts and distilled them into actionable tips for parents.



Welcome to Nomster Chef's mini e-mail series: 10 Healthy Hacks to Cracking the Code to Your Kid's Eating Habits!

You've done the hard part (signing up), now all you need to do is check your inbox during the next 10 days for an email series full of strategies to help your child eat healthy foods. Each lesson will take less than 5 minutes to read and will give you easy action items you can try with your family. And the best part is that we didn't make this stuff up, all of these strategies have been researched by child nutrition and psychology experts.

Ready? Let's goooooo!!!

Healthy Hack #1: Keep offering a new food over and over, even if the child rejects it at first

Experts say that it can take kids 5-20 exposures to a new food before it will transition into their accepted foods list. It is of course very natural to fall into the habit of categorizing your kids' eating preferences (i.e. "Olivia just doesn't like kale."). But if kale is rejected one time, try to resist the temptation to take it off your grocery shopping list permanently.

Some ways to use this trick:

1. Pick 1-3 "target" foods at a time that you want to help your child add into his repertoire. Over the course of a few weeks, plan on making the food in a variety of ways. Ideas include: raw, steamed, sautéed, baked, pureed, grilled, with a dipping sauce, seasoned with spices, etc.
2. Ask your child to take one bite of the food each time you offer it, and explain that your food likes change over time. Maybe this will be the time they like it! But if they don't like it, it can be a "No thank you bite," and they can wait until another day to try it again.

3. Make a "trying new food" chart. Put it on the fridge, and have your child add a sticker or check mark on the chart every time they try the new food.

Some phrases to have in your back pocket:

- "No Thank You Bite"
- "Maybe this will be the time you like this food!"
- "You don't know if you'll like it until you try it 20 times"

Why do kids need 20 tries before they like a food?

Kids are born with what experts call "food neophobia," or a fear of trying new foods. It's not just your child (phew!), all kids are wired this way. Academics think that food neophobia traces back to our caveman roots and is an evolutionary protection- if caveman toddlers were afraid of eating the new poisonous berries they foraged for, they survived to adulthood.

And if food neophobia isn't enough of a challenge, kids' caveman instincts also make them:

- Predisposed to liking carbs and sugar more than anything else, because they keep starving cavemen alive
- Predisposed to disliking bitter foods because bitter tastes often signal "poisonous" to humans (and unfortunately veggies are often bitter!)

Resources:

["The pickiest of kids ate dozens of foods after a two-week training devised by a psychologist"](#)

["6 Food Mistakes Parents Make"](#)

["How Children Learn to Like New Food"](#)

[The 52 New Foods Challenge](#)



So you want your child to make healthy choices, but there are so many delicious non-healthy treats out there! What's a well-meaning parent to do? You don't have to become a raw vegan clean eating fanatic to help your child eat healthfully. (Though if that describes your family, that's cool too. No judgies.)

Healthy Hack #2: Treats are "sometimes foods", not "forbidden" foods

Experts say that making a food "off limits" actually makes your child want that food *more*.

Researchers found that when a parent banned a food, the child ate more of that food when the parent was not around.

Some ways to use this trick:

1. Help your child learn the difference between "sometimes food" and "all the time food." (Or another system is ["Red Light, Yellow Light, and Green Light"](#) food)
2. Try not to label different foods as "bad." This can lead the child to feel conflicted if they eat a "bad" food and like it.
3. Try as best you can not to overly celebrate junk food. It's better if they're an normal, but occasional part of life. Building up treats as once-in-a-lifetime special occasion food makes them feel extra desirable, but of course going to the other end of the spectrum and eating a customary bowl of ice cream every night isn't a great solution either.
4. Feel good about the treats that your family does include in their diet by making them yourself. Homemade baked goods are, any way you slice it, better for you than a store-bought packaged sweet. Homemade pizza will be healthier than take-out pizza. And

when you make these treats yourself, you can substitute ingredients to make them better-for-you (whole wheat flour, greek yogurt, applesauce are favorite substitutions).

5. Try to model a balanced attitude towards food. If you can avoid it, don't talk about being on a diet or about feeling guilty for eating "bad food" in front of your kids.
6. Don't use food treats as a reward for good behavior (which can increase kids' already high preference for junk food)

Some phrases to have in your back pocket:

- "Cookies are a sometime food, and you already had one today. So let's choose an all the time food like strawberries instead."
- "Broccoli is a green light food, you can eat as much as you want!"

Why shouldn't I ban my child from eating sweets and potato chips?

This idea probably makes intuitive sense to anyone that's ever been a teenager, parented a teenager, known a teenager, seen an angsty teen movie... when the parent says "you may NOT go out with that boy," it only makes the teenager want to do that thing more. The same concept applies here. When a parent forbids a food, it actually makes a child more interested in it. What is this scandalous thing I'm not allowed to eat? It must be reallllly good. And so when they're left to their own devices at friends' homes or with other caregivers, kids are more likely to eat the forbidden foods.

Also, teaching a child about how to make good food choices helps them navigate all those times you can't be with them- the school lunch line, a playdate at a friend's, or when Grandma wants to spoil her grandchild. Simply restricting a food doesn't help kids practice self-regulation and decision making.

Resources:

[Sesame Street's "A Cookie is a Sometime Food"](#)

Academic Paper: ["Parental Influence on Eating Behavior"](#)

["When Parents Try to Control Every Little Bite"](#)

["6 Food Mistakes Parents Make"](#)



We've all been there. You prepare a yummy dinner for your family, but your kiddo takes two bites and announces she's full. Argghh!!! What should you do next?!

Healthy Hack #3: Don't insist your kids join the clean plate club

Experts say that asking kids to finish everything on their plates can teach them to ignore their body's natural hunger cues. This can lead to overeating and weight gain later in life. Instead, let your little take the lead in determining how much to eat.

Some ways to use this trick:

1. Don't force your child to finish their meal (and if food waste is your primary concern, save it in a tupperware for tomorrow, no biggie).
2. Ask your child to "check in with your tummy" and see if it feels hungry or full.
3. Accept "I'm done!" as truth. Acknowledge that your child may not actually be hungry (just like you're sometimes less hungry than other times.) This is especially true if they're transitioning

into the preschool years: they're actually growing less than when they were toddlers and so they might need less food than before.

4. Try not to worry about a missed meal. Kids will be okay if they miss meals every once in a while. If they really are hungry, they'll eat!
5. Don't excuse your kiddo from the table until the rest of the family is finished eating. That way, you know his declaring "I'm done!" is not just a ploy for more play time.

A phrase to have in your back pocket:

- "Check in with your tummy"

What's wrong with cleaning your plate?

Research shows that when parents are overly controlling towards what their children eat, it can have a negative impact later in life:

- One study showed that parents who pressured their kids into eating led to the kids eating fewer vegetables in the future.
- Another showed that kids with parents who encouraged "plate cleaning" made them less sensitive to the caloric content of what they're eating. Rather than being mindful and listening to their body's needs, kids focused on eating as much as possible.
- And another showed that kids who were allowed to practice an "intuitive eating style" had lower rates of dieting and eating disorders in adulthood.

Also, if kids are asked to finish their meal and they don't want to, this can often lead to arguments and power struggles. If at all possible, it's best to not let power struggles complicate eating, which can already be tricky. You've probably got enough other battles to pick :)

Resources:

["Why Kids Shouldn't Be Hearing 'Clean Your Plate' at Mealtimes"](#)

["Why Do Parents Still Urge Kids To 'Clean Your Plate?'"](#)

["Making Your Kid Clean Their Plate Might Give Them An Eating Disorder"](#)

Academic Paper: ["Parental Influence on Eating Behavior"](#)



```
{% if subscriber.first_name != blank %}
```

```
Hi {{ subscriber.first_name }},
```

```
{% else %}
```

```
Hi Nomster,
```

```
{% endif %}
```

You made it to Day #4!

To recap, so far we've learned:

- Healthy Hack #1: Keep offering a new food over and over, even if the child rejects it at first
- Healthy Hack #2: Treats are "sometimes foods", not "forbidden" foods
- Healthy Hack #3: Don't insist your kids join the clean plate club

And today we're going to keep on trucking and learn phrases parents, siblings, and teachers can say to encourage a child to eat a food. May the force be with you!

Healthy Hack #4: Talk about an ingredient in a positive way

Kids, as you're well aware, are mini sponges. They pick up on a lot of cues from their parents, teachers, siblings, and peers. You can use that to your advantage when it comes to food!

Some ways to use this trick:

1. When you're cooking or eating, make a point to taste a food and say things like "Yum!", "This is so good!", or in our case, "Nom nom nom!"
2. Know that kids (like grown-ups) generally respond better to the "this is delicious" line of reasoning rather than the "eat this because it's good for you" approach.
3. If you genuinely don't like the food, you don't have to lie! If you're trying a new food or recipe yourself and it turns out to be less than stellar, no need to say "delicious" through a pained yuck face. Instead, describe non-judgemental aspects of the food like "this celery is so crunchy" or "wow this eggplant is so purple." But do your best not to say things like "this is gross."
4. If you have the luxury of another sibling in your family that likes the food you're eating, prompt him to talk about it too. Siblings can positively influence each other when it comes to trying food. Though of course, this also works in reverse if a sibling dislikes a food, so tread carefully. ;)

Phrases to have in your back pocket:

- "These carrots are awesome!"
- "Yum!" "Mmmm!"
- "Jack (big brother), aren't tomatoes some of your favorite food?"
- "Well this cheese sure has a sour smell."

Does just talking about food really help your kid try it?

Yes! Especially if you emphasize how delicious the food is. In one study, kids ate more crackers when they were described as "yummy" than when they were described as "healthy." This makes sense: of course we all get excited about eating something delicious!

Kids pick up on all of the behaviors that adults model (good and bad). By showing them how awesome and not scary new foods are, you can influence their attitude about food over time.

Resources:

[120 words to use when describing food to kids](#)

[How Do We Get Kids to Like Healthy Foods?](#)

[Get Your Kids to Eat Everything, the French Way](#)

[Want your kids to eat healthy food? Stop calling it healthy](#)



Day #5 means you're halfway through this mini e-mail series. Yay, you, you're awesome! Your kids are lucky to have such a great parent.

Today's tip is all about letting kids be the boss of their own food (within reason of course). Read on to find out how!

Healthy Hack #5: Let kids have a say in what food they eat

This tip is really a Jedi mind trick- you're going to make your kids think they're in control of the food they're eating, but really you're letting them choose from a small list of parent-approved items. But because they chose the food, they'll still prefer to eat it more than other food. #winning

Some ways to use this trick:

1. Take your child grocery shopping or to the farmer's market. Allow him to pick one ingredient from the produce section, whichever he wants! When you serve it, make a big deal about how it was his special choice.
2. When offering a snack, give your kiddo a short list of things to choose from, i.e. "for snack would you like carrot sticks or raisins?". The key here is to only offer a finite list of things, not to open up Pandora's snack box. Help them focus by offering only 2-3 foods.
3. For dinner, some kids do well with meals that allow them to customize. One easy way to do this is a taco bar night, where a kid can choose from corn, tomatoes, or guacamole as topping. Another version is to serve a typical protein + starch + veggie combo family style but offer several different veggies to choose from (i.e. chicken, brown rice, peas, string beans). Then the child can make her own plate.
4. Let older kids pack their own lunches. Ask them to pick elements from a list of pre-approved items before you go grocery shopping, and set aside time each night for them to pack the next day's lunch.
5. Involve kids in meal planning. When you're making your shopping list, ask if they have ideas for meals or snacks they'd like.

Phrases to have in your back pocket:

- "What special ingredient would you like to buy this week?"
- "Would you like ____ or ____ for snack?"
- "For dinner we're having chicken and rice, would you like ____ or ____ to go with it?"
- "What should we have for dinner next week?"

Why are kids more likely to eat food they've chosen?

When you think about it, a lot of a kid's life is controlled by someone other than themselves. If kids get the chance to make decisions, the autonomy makes them feel super empowered. On the other hand, if a food is being forced on them, their natural reaction will be to reject it. But if you let them choose the food, you'll help them feel like eating that item was their idea in the first place (even if you helped guide them to that decision).

Expert Ellyn Satter says that it's the parent's job to decide "what, when, and where" kids eat, but it should be up to the kiddo to decide "how much" food and "whether" or not to eat the food. Reframing mealtimes in this way might help your family avoid epic mealtime power struggles.

Resources:

[Toddlers at the Table: Avoiding Power Struggles](#)

[Ellyn Satter's Division of Responsibility in Feeding](#)

[Let Kids Pick, Pack, and Polish Off a Healthy Lunch](#)

[PBS Kids: Encourage Kids to Eat Healthy Food](#)



Day #6, woo hoo! You're pretty awesome, do you know that?

Today's tip might help any parents who feel like they spend too much time in the kitchen catering to different family demands. Does that ring a bell?

Healthy Hack #6: Don't be a short order cook

Experts recommend only serving one meal to your family, rather than having a grown-up meal and separate kid meals that satisfy their culinary whims. If you often find yourself making multiple meals per mealtime, this strategy might test your patience at first. But if you stick with it, it should make your life easier in the long run!

Some ways to use this trick:

1. If your child is refusing to eat, don't offer an alternative meal. (This is different than yesterday's trick, which is offering different toppings/sides for a meal. That's cool!)
2. Don't offer snacks, milk, or juice too close to mealtimes- hungry kids are more likely to eat whatever's on the table.
3. For really picky eaters, serve something at every meal that you know your child will eat (like fruit, bread, rice, cheese).
4. Remind your child that they can choose not to eat this meal, but they won't be able to eat again until the next regularly scheduled mealtime or snacktime.
5. Know that while it may make you worry, pediatricians say that it's okay if a child skips a meal every now and again.

Phrases to have in your back pocket:

- "This is the only dinner we have, your choice is to eat this dinner or to not eat dinner."
- "It's okay if you're not hungry now, but remember that you'll have to wait until breakfast for your next meal."

Shouldn't I make sure my kids eat something during each meal?

When your child refuses dinner and gets a PB&J sandwich instead, she learns that by putting up a little bit of a fuss she can eat the same safe meal every night. She has no incentive to branch out

and try new things, because she'll always have a reliable standby. When she knows that there's no alternative, she just might surprise you and start to take bites of new kinds of food.

It can feel really difficult not to offer alternatives because it might seem like kids aren't getting enough to eat. Or, it might seem like they're not eating a balanced meal. But experts point out that kids don't have the will power to go on a hunger strike- if they're hungry, they will eat something. Experts suggest making sure kids don't snack too close to mealtimes, because the hungrier they are when they sit down to eat, the more likely they are to eat what's on the plate. And, they urge parents not to worry about how balanced each individual mealtime is- it's more important to aim for a balanced diet over the course of a week.

Resources:

[The Best Reason to Stop Being A Short Order Cook](#)

[Healthy Tips for Picky Eaters](#)

[Stop Making Kids Separate Meals](#)



Day #7 is here! You're pretty awesome, do you know that?

To recap, so far we've learned:

- Healthy Hack #1: Keep offering a new food over and over, even if the child rejects it at first
- Healthy Hack #2: Treats are "sometimes foods", not "forbidden" foods
- Healthy Hack #3: Don't insist your kids join the clean plate club

- Healthy Hack #4: Talk about an ingredient in a positive way
- Healthy Hack #5: Let kids have a say in what food they eat
- Healthy Hack #6: Don't be a short order cook

Today we're talking about how a good pairing might help your child try a new food. But *of course* we are not talking about a wine pairing. :) Do you know any kiddos who will eat any vegetable as long as it's served with his favorite ranch dipping sauce? It turns out, those kids might be on to something!

Healthy Hack #7: The Preschool Pairing

This strategy is pretty straightforward: serve something your child doesn't like with something she does.

Some ways to use this trick:

1. Pair a preferred food with a not preferred food. If they love pizza, try topping it with broccoli. If they love a good sweet potato side, serve sweet potatoes as well as asparagus with the meal.
2. Let them top their disliked food with something they do like- ketchup, ranch dip, cheese, lemon, salt, hummus, guacamole, spaghetti sauce, that weird mustard/sriracha/mayo combo they invented, anything! The pairing trick is especially effective when you combine very bitter foods like brussels sprouts with sweeter foods like cream cheese.
3. If the pairing trick encourages your child to try a disliked food, try gradually phasing out the topping/dip over time.

Phrases to have in your back pocket:

- "Would you like to try this with some ketchup on top?"
- "Sure, you can sprinkle a little cheese on top."

Will my kid only eat broccoli with ketchup for the rest of his life?

Great news, no! Research suggests that some kids might need these pairings only for the initial couple of tastes. After that, they might be open to eating the food on its own.

While research has long proven that kids need lots of exposures to a new food to like it, new research suggests that super bitter foods can be an especially difficult hurdle for kids to clear. So, if you want to help your child add greens to their repertoire, serving them with a topping he likes may help stack the deck in his favor.

Also, serving a liked food next to an disliked food might inspire bravery. If kids see an ingredient that they like, and know they can eat, it can decrease their anxiety about the meal. Then, they might feel safe enough to branch out and try its neighbor on the plate.

Resources:

[10 Kid-Friendly Dipping Sauce Ideas](#)

[Adding Dip to Veggies Gets Kids to Eat More](#)

[What Sensory Therapists Can Teach Us About Feeding Picky Kids](#)

[Cure for a Picky Eater: Evidence-based tips](#)



Day #8 is here! Almost to the finish line!

Today's tip is definitely the most fun... encouraging your kiddos to play with their food!

Healthy Hack #8: Play with Your Food

Research suggests that experiencing a new food through the other 4 senses (besides taste of course) can also help make a child more open to trying new food.

Some ways to use this trick:

1. Sight: Head to the grocery store or farmer's market and try to find the weirdest looking food possible. Encourage kids to draw a picture of a food.
2. Smell: If a kiddo is unwilling to taste a food, ask them to smell it instead. Play a game- with your eyes closed, how many foods can you correctly identify just by smell?
3. Touch: Make art projects with food. Ask kids to do an experiment - which fruit is the most squishy?
4. Hear: Encourage your child to hear the "snap" of breaking peas in half, listen to milk being poured, pay close attention when stirring a bowl of food, hear the sizzle of food on the stove.

Phrases to have in your back pocket:

- "It's okay if you don't want to try a tomato, but will you try smelling it? Or squeezing it?"
- "Listen carefully, does this carrot make a sound?"
- "Whoa, check out that Romanesco broccoli. Doesn't it have crazy shapes?"

But don't I want my child to *eat* the food, not just look at it?

A big part of the reason kids won't try new food is that it's unfamiliar. Think of the last time you did something new- you were probably nervous too! Experiencing food in a non-eating context can help food feel less foreign and threatening to kids. Then, maybe the next time they see it on the dinner plate, they'll be open to giving it a try.

This strategy may be most effective with young kids- in one study researchers found that sensory play had a very positive effect on kids age 1-3 years. Kids in the study that were exposed to new

food through sensory play were willing to try those foods and even learned to like those new foods more than others!

Resources:

[Fun Fruit and Veggie Stamp Projects](#)

[10 activities for farmer's market fun](#)

["Honeybee" Smelling Game](#)

[What Sensory Therapists Can Teach Us About Feeding Picky Kids](#)



Day #9 = awesomesauce! You're almost done!

Today's tip is one of the hardest to implement in real life, with real stubborn kids. But, we think you're up to the challenge! Go, you!

Healthy Hack #9: Don't bribe a kid to eat food (with dessert or other rewards)

It's probable that every person reading this e-mail (including ourselves!) has done this: offered a bribe to encourage a kid to eat a disliked food. You know, the classic "if you eat 5 pieces of broccoli, you can have a cookie" strategy. It works, right? So why do experts say not to use this tactic?

Well, it definitely works in the very short term, meaning your child eats the broccoli and benefits from its nutrients. BUT, it actually makes your child dislike the broccoli more in the future. (more on how this works down below)

Some ways to use this trick:

1. Instead of requiring that a child eat a certain amount of food to earn a dessert, let the child decide how much and what to eat.
2. Avoid other non-food rewards like TV/screen time, stickers, etc., in exchange for eating more food.
3. As a replacement for the bribing technique, use all of the other tips you've learned in this mini e-mail course instead

Phrases to have in your back pocket:

- Don't say: "If you eat 4 more pieces of chicken, you can watch Paw Patrol"
- Don't say: "If you don't finish your dinner, you can't have dessert."

Why are food bribes so bad?

When adults say, "if you finish your brussels sprouts you can have dessert," kids think, "wow, those brussels sprouts must be *really* bad if I get a treat when I eat them." Research shows that over time, kids actually like food less if they were offered a reward for eating it.

A related topic is rewarding a child for good non-eating-related behavior with food, i.e., "after you do your homework, you can have an ice cream." Research suggests that food-based rewards actually make kids prefer the reward food even more than they already did.

But, while this advice may sound great on paper, it can be really hard to implement in your real life. We totally get it. We hope that we've given you lots of other tools so that you can use bribes fewer times than usual. Small wins!

Resources:

[Why Bribing Kids to Eat their Vegetables is not a Long Term Solution](#)

[How Bribing Your Child to Eat Can Backfire](#)

[What Rewarding Kids with Food Looks Like 20 Years Later](#)



Day #10, YOU MADE IT!!!! You are amazing.

Our last Healthy Hack is our absolute favorite. It's the trick that the whole Nomster Chef company is based on, in fact. :)

Healthy Hack #10: Involve kids in the kitchen

Research shows kids are more likely try food that they've helped to cook. Involving them in the cooking process, in big or small ways, can encourage kids to eat more healthfully and try new food.

Some ways to use this trick:

1. Cook an entire meal with your kids
2. Ask your kids to do part of the prep (snapping green bean ends, adding the eggs to the pancake, etc.)
3. Prepare a snack with them (easier with younger kids)

Phrases to have in your back pocket:

- "You made this, it is so delicious!"
- "I'm really proud of how hard you worked and focused to make dinner for our family."

Are you just saying this because you have a kids' cooking company?

No! Nomster Chef started out as a grad school project at Stanford, and is based on lots of academic research. Some of the research we found most compelling was learning that kids are more likely to try a food that they've helped cook.

It makes a ton of sense, especially when you think about some of the other research-backed advice this e-mail class covered.

- Cooking offers opportunities for kids to get their 20 exposures to a new ingredient, both during meal prep and during the completed mealtime. (Healthy Hack #1: Keep offering a new food over and over)
- While cooking, you can taste an ingredient and talk about how delicious it is (Healthy Hack #4: talk about an ingredient in a positive way)
- While cooking, you can let kids decide how much of an ingredient to put in (Healthy Hack #5: Let kids have a say in what they eat)
- During cooking, kids can have sensory experiences with the food (touching, smelling, hearing and seeing). (Healthy Hack #8: Play with Your Food)

If you're excited to stay involved with Nomster Chef and learn more about cooking with kids, stay tuned! We'll send more info tomorrow about how to do just that!

Sign up for Nomster Chef today (it's FREE!)

You can get all the illustrated recipe picture books for kids in the Nomster Recipe Library and start cooking with your kids today! All you need to do is create a free account, and then you can see all the illustrated recipes, grocery lists, and parent pro tips!

[Sign up here](#)

Resources:

[Why Cook with Kids?](#)

[Cooking with Kids: 5 Reasons Why You Should Be Doing It](#)

[Jamie Oliver: Please, Just Start Cooking with Your Children](#)