



STOP THE MEALTIME MADNESS

**HOW TO GET KIDS
TO EAT ANYTHING**

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**Stop the Mealtime Madness:
How to Get Kids to Eat Anything**

By

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Thank you!

DEDICATION

To every family who wants their kids to be healthy, to be grateful for the food that is on their plates, and just enjoy time together at mealtime.

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INTRODUCTION

Are meal times crazy in your home? Is it hard to get your baby or young children to eat their food—let alone try new foods? Are you tired of the complaining or silliness or stubbornness? Meal times can be tough. Meal times can be exhausting. We understand. We've been there! Now, we have three kids that eat everything (well, almost everything) that we put on their plates. There are no arguments. There is no bribing, bargaining, or fighting. We have learned many secrets, tips, and tricks, and even some “tough love” strategies that we have used in order to help raise our kids to choose to eat healthy and eat whatever is on their plates, so we can enjoy our mealtimes together as a family.

Obviously, if you're reading this book, we know you're looking for help with your mealtime madness, and we definitely hope to give you some answers! However, we also hate books that make you feel that the ideas that they share are the only ways to find success. The fact is that you are your child's parent and God has given you the wisdom to parent him/her. We want to be direct and matter-of-fact with you, but we also want you to know that it is our prayer that you can take the ideas you learn from this book and find what works for **you** and **your family**. Feel free to disagree with some strategies but love other strategies. We have found that the ideas we will share have worked with all three of our children, and we hope that you will learn some ways to help your family too.

If mealtimes stress you out; if your kids are complaining and ungrateful; if you're constantly begging or bargaining or bribing them to eat, we will help you! Mealtimes don't have to be chaotic and stressful. In fact, it's our goal to help all families make mealtime an opportunity where kids are grateful for the food on their plate, where kids are willingly making healthy choices for themselves, and where parents can relax and enjoy a meal with their family! Sound impossible? Read on...

Lord, bless each parent reading this book. Give them wisdom to guide their family in grateful hearts, healthy eating, and in enjoying mealtimes together. Amen.

OUR STORY

IT ISN'T ABOUT LUCK

We have to be honest with you. After our first child ate anything and everything, we thought we just got lucky. After our second child did too, we thought: “Oh, lucky again.” When our third was born, the pressure was on. Will he also eat anything and everything too? Could we be so “lucky” to have all three kids that eat anything we put on their plates? We were nervous. We started paying close attention to what we did with him to encourage that kind of eating, and we saw that there was much more to it than luck. There were many, many, many moments when we looked at each other and said: “And this is where it starts,” or could have started if we allowed that behavior to continue.

We actually realized how hard it was to teach kids to eat anything. We noticed that there were many moments when the easier option would have been for us to give in to their fits or acknowledge their dislikes, but we also knew that giving in would have only been a short-term fix. Our long-term vision for our kids and for our family was that our kids would have an appreciation for the food that was on their plates even if they didn't love it...that our kids would choose to eat healthy, balanced meals...that they would value spending time together as a family around our dinner table...that mealtimes wouldn't be a battleground...and that we would just have fun together and enjoy eating together.

It wasn't easy, and we still have to work at it, but it's worth it. Mealtimes are (relatively) peaceful in our house. Mealtimes are (almost always) fun in our house. Mealtimes are a pleasure (most of the time) in our house because we can buy healthy food, put it on their plates, and we know that it will get eaten. All three of our kids are great eaters and even though we still have to find strategies that work to help them make healthy eating choices, we continue to fight this fight because it is worth it to us. We aren't perfect. Our kids aren't perfect, but we feel so blessed that God has given us such wisdom to not only use with our own family, but also to teach to other families.

The health of our kids matters. The gratefulness of our kids' hearts matters. The togetherness and fun at mealtime with our family matters. We can't wait to share with you what worked for us...

****This book is simply a testimony of how we taught and continue to teach our kids to eat anything. It is a resource where we share our opinions and ideas that worked for our family in hopes that it will help you with yours, but some strategies may not be best for all kids or all families. If your child has any physical conditions or mental health conditions, it is best to consult your pediatrician or a specialist for any eating/feeding struggles. We are praying for you!**

** Obviously, this book is much more helpful for parents with young ones, but it's not hopeless if you do have older kids. It just may be more challenging to implement these ideas if your kids have already developed habits that bring stress to mealtime. If you do want to try this with older kids, we recommend having a family meeting first...a "This-is-How-It's-Going-To-Be-From-Now-On" Meeting. Take some time to let them know the new system at mealtime. Communicating to your kids that things are going to change is always helpful. Remember that change in a family doesn't happen by fear or force, but instead by teamwork and togetherness! Let them know that you love them and that you want them to learn to make healthy choices. You want them to learn to be grateful for the food that is on their plates, and you want the entire family to learn to enjoy mealtimes together more often.

DEFINING MEALTIME

First, let's talk about what mealtime is and is not. We will refer to these points throughout the book.

Mealtime is...

- **An opportunity to spend time together as a family.**
- **A time to talk about our day.**
- **A time to be grateful for the food that is on our plates.**
- **A time to eat healthy nourishing foods.**
- **A time for family unity—eating the same thing at the same time!**

It's about healthiness, gratefulness, and togetherness.

Mealtime is *not*...

- An opportunity to be silly or disrespectful.
- A time for every member of the family to get every wish or request granted.
- A time to complain or be ungrateful.

Mealtimes are supposed to be about gathering as a family, eating healthy food together, and being grateful for whatever is on our plates. It's not a time to have our kids share every like and dislike that they've ever had in their entire lives while griping about the food, acting silly, and being disrespectful. It's just not. It's not the time for us to put on our chef's hat, take orders, and make every plate to every member of our family's very particular specifications. It's just not.

We are *not* serving kings and queens here. Mealtimes are not about pleasing the royal highnesses with everything that we put on their plates. It's impossible to try to please everyone in our household for every meal, and we shouldn't even try. We don't have enough money nor do we have the energy to do that. Mealtimes are about spending time together and being grateful for whatever healthy food is on our plates. Period.

In fact the prayer that we pray before every meal is:

“Lord, we are grateful for the food on our plate, and especially for the people around our table.”

It's that simple. That's what mealtime is all about...being grateful for our healthy food and enjoying the company of the people around our table.

With that focus in mind, let's explore some ways to bring togetherness and gratefulness to your dinner table and get your kids to eat anything. You deserve this. Your family deserves this too.

IT STARTS WITH US

OUR KIDS ARE WATCHING US

If we want our kids to eat healthy, *we* have to eat healthy. If we want our kids to be grateful for the food on their plates, *we* have to be grateful. If we want our kids to value spending time together as a family at mealtime, *we* have to make time in our busy schedules to have meals together as a family.

START EATING HEALTHY AS EARLY AS POSSIBLE

As early as we possibly can, we must eat healthy in front of our kids. Pregnancy is obviously a great time to start because our baby eats whatever we eat. What a great opportunity to feed them a wide variety of fruits and vegetables! They can't complain about what we eat. They can't spit it out. They can't refuse it. They can't push it around on their plate and pretend to eat it. They have to eat it. It's truly a great gift to give our babies—the exposure to nourishing, healthy foods early-on in life.

WE ARE A WALKING EXAMPLE

Healthy eating can start at any time though, and healthy eating should continue throughout our lives—for our own well-being and especially for the well-being of our children. Kids are far more likely to make healthy choices and eat whatever is on their plates if they see us doing the same thing. Kids will simply mirror us. If we complain...they will. If we eat unhealthy...they will. If we scoff at something because it's less than perfect...they will. If we waste food...they will. Kids will follow our lead on everything we do. They mimic us in words and actions as well as in what we eat and our gratitude towards food.

Here is a great list of foods to start eating as a family more often from A to Z:

A: Avocados, Asparagus, Apples, Almonds

B: Bananas, Blueberries, Broccoli, Beef

C: Cherries, Cranberries, Cantaloupe, Cheese, Carrots, Cauliflower, Celery, Cucumbers, Chicken

D: Dates

E: Eggs

F: Fish (limit this because of mercury)

G: Grapes, Green Pepper, Green Beans, Ground Beef

H: Hummus

I: Ice Cream (an awesome treat to enjoy as a family)

J: Juice (organic only)

K: Kiwi

L: Lettuce, Lemons, Lean Meats

M: Mangoes

N: Nuts (almonds, pecans, peanuts, etc.)

O: Oranges, Orange Peppers, Onions

P: Pears, Pineapples, Plums, Potatoes

Q: Quinoa, Quince

R: Raspberries, Red Peppers, Radishes,

S: Sweet Potatoes, Snow Peas, Steak

T: Tomatoes, Tofu, Turnips

U: Uhhh, how about some more ice cream? 😊

V: Vegetables

W: Water, Watermelon, Wheat Grass

X: Xtra Protein

Y: Yellow Peppers, Yellow Squash, Yogurt

Z: Zucchini

FROM OUR HOME...

- The other night, I (Christine) made pasta sauce for our family that was horrible. I was trying something new and found what I thought was a great seasoning packet and it turned out to be quite flavorless. Basically, it was a plain tomato puree on top of noodles with some cheese. The whole sauce was just bland and quite yucky. All five of us ate every bite of it. There were some faces and some “eeewws” under their breaths, but everyone finished what was on their plates and left the table. Honestly, I could barely get it down, but we all ate it. No, it was not good, but it was tolerable. Yes, we could have said “YUCK! This is gross. Let’s order a pizza!” (which I almost did), but we wanted to

set the example of gratefulness. More importantly, it was food that so many other people in the world would have happily eaten and appreciated, so who were we to complain about food that wasn't perfect?

You are your child's greatest teacher in all areas of life. What you eat and your own grateful attitude towards food can make a huge difference!

KEY POINTS...

- ✓ **Getting kids to eat anything needs to start as early as possible.**
- ✓ **Kids are watching what you eat and how much you complain about or appreciate food.**
- ✓ **Be aware of your own food attitude and food habits so that both you and your kids will be healthy!**

TRY THIS...

Change your eating habits first. Start to eat healthier yourself and see what happens! Talk about how delicious your healthy food is!

IT'S TIME TO FEED THE BABY

OVER AND OVER AND OVER

The earlier we start to encourage our kids to eat healthy, the easier it will be for our family. So let's talk about some strategies for babies.

We've all seen babies make those awful (yet hilarious) faces when we give them a new food for the first time. It's clear that babies develop opinions about foods very early. When our kids were young, we read in one of the many baby books for first-time parents (sorry we don't remember the title) that it takes *twelve times* after introducing a new food for a baby to actually start liking it. Twelve times! It is so important when they are babies to continue giving them a variety of healthy baby foods, and don't stop if they make a face or don't like it once. We have to keep giving them good, healthy nourishing foods over and over and over. Despite their protests, they will eventually come around.

SELL, SELL, SELL

Remember that it matters what we eat in front of our children. If babies aren't "sold" on a certain food, we can eat it and show them how yummy it tastes. We never talk about how "yucky" it is. As we're feeding each bite to them, we can say "Mmmmmmmmmmm...so good!" Don't get discouraged. Remember, continue to feed them healthy foods over and over even if they keep rejecting them. Try mixing something they don't like with something that they do like. Don't forget the yummy noises! They will follow mommy or daddy's lead. If we are nervous and unsure about what we're feeding them, they will feel the same way. Be excited. Be enthusiastic. Sell it to them and then keep feeding it to them. Remember the goal—healthy kids, grateful kids, and pleasant mealtimes.

FROM OUR HOME...

- When we began moving out of the baby jar phase, we decided to start with a sure fire winner...mac-n-cheese! We thought "Oh, he's going to love this." He didn't at all. He spit it out and made a face and we panicked. We thought "Oh no! How can he hate mac-n-cheese? What is wrong with this kid?" Then we calmed down and remembered that we had to feed it to him at least twelve times, so we gave it to him again and again until he finally liked it. Whew. What a relief that was.

Give your baby a variety of foods—lots of vegetables and fruits. Now, they even have pouches with fruits and vegetables all mixed together. Babies are at a wonderful phase of life where they are willing to try new things—take full advantage of it. They are a captive audience, sitting in their high-chair, waiting for you to teach them about food. The protests will come early. Just stay cool. Don't panic. Just keep feeding babies balanced healthy foods. Their health and your sanity is worth it!

KEY POINTS...

- ✓ **Feed your baby foods—even if they don't like it---over and over. It could take more than twelve times of introducing a food before they will actually like it.**
- ✓ **“Sell” the food to your baby. Say “Yummy!” and be encouraging even if they make faces.**
- ✓ **Give a variety of healthy foods to them and eat healthy food in front of them.**

TRY THIS...

If there was a food your baby didn't like the first time, try to give it to him/her again. See how many times it takes before they finally eat it. It will probably take less time than you realize.

KIDS ARE NOT IN CHARGE

DON'T CARE IF THEY DON'T EAT

Ok. We know this next tip sounds awful and we can hear the gasping now, but remember that it is our job as parents to fix our kids balanced healthy meals and their only job is to eat it and if they don't, that is their choice. We don't have to argue about it. We don't have to even pay any attention to it. We are so blessed to have so much food in our country and if our kids aren't going to be grateful for the food that is on their plates and they refuse to eat it, well, that is their choice. They will just be hungry, and that's ok. Thank God that our kids will not starve if they skip one meal or maybe even two. Quickly, they will get the point if you stick to it. Remember that mealtime is not about satisfying the needs and requests of every member of our family. It's about being grateful for whatever is on our plates.

FAST FOOD FOR EVERY MEAL? NO!

Sometimes kids claim that they will only eat a certain food for every meal. We understand. Our kids have gone through the "cracker phase" and the "bread phase", but that doesn't stop us from putting a balanced, healthy meal on their plate. It doesn't force us to give them only crackers or bread. If kids claim they will only eat fast food for every meal, well, they can't they drive themselves to a fast food restaurant, read the menu, order their own food, have enough money to pay for their food, and drive home all by themselves. So, if they shout that they will only eat fast food for dinner, the only way that will happen is if we allow it, and we shouldn't. Kids shouldn't get what they *want* for every meal. They should get what they *need*.

The point is: Our kids are not in charge. We are. We have a huge responsibility of teaching them what foods are healthy for their bodies and what foods are not. If our children claim that they will only eat a certain food, that's ok. They can have that opinion all they want, but they aren't going to get it every single time they ask for it. Kids shouldn't say that they will only eat crackers or peanut butter and jelly or a certain kind of chip or fast food and then that's all we give them. No. *Kids are not in charge!*

We have a shopping budget and a meal-plan, and we stick to it. Nothing stops us from putting healthy food on their plates every single time...well, almost every single time!

Healthy food is what is best for our kids and that's the kind of food they are going to get because we love them and care about their well-being.

OH THE SUGAR!!!

Kids cannot call the shots when it comes to food. Maybe that's why we see kids going to school with cookies and doughnuts and candy and sodas in their lunch boxes because "Mom knows I like sugar." Of course kids like sugar! Who doesn't? But it's our job to teach them that sugar is for special occasions and that healthy foods are best for them. When we give in to what our kids *will* eat instead of giving them what they *should* eat, their health, their focus, their weight, and

their overall well-being suffers. It is our job to put healthy food in front of our children and if they don't eat it, they don't get fast food or candy or doughnuts instead.

We cannot waste time and money caring about their every single desire when it comes to food. Kids have to learn to eat what is put on their plate and be grateful for it or they just won't eat. We shouldn't feel bad about it either. We have fixed a meal for them and they are to eat it and be grateful for it and that's that! See? We told you these were tough love strategies.

Don't fix them a new meal. Don't drive them to get fast food. Don't offer them anything else but what is on their plate. They may protest. They may scream. They may refuse to eat, but that's ok. It really is. Remember that mealtime is not about pleasing every member of our family. That's just impossible!

Soon they will learn that they have to eat what is served or they don't eat at all. Parenting isn't about being popular or well-liked by our kids. We can't be afraid that our children will dislike us. In fact, if we explain that we want them to be healthy and are feeding them healthy food because we love them, they may not like our actions, but they may understand at least a little more.

FROM OUR HOME...

- Don't be surprised at how early this protest of food happens. We'll never forget when our son was sixteen months old and we made him a little snack of yogurt and berries. He protested in a big way. He didn't want yogurt and berries. He threw a huge fit! We refused to make him something else. That was his snack and if he didn't want it, he didn't have to eat it, but that was his snack. Well, after his protest was over, he ate every single bite.
- Another time, our daughter found out she was getting grilled cheese for lunch. "I DON'T WANT GRILLED CHEESE!!!!" She screamed. "I DON'T LIKE GRILLED CHEESE. I WANT PEANUT BUTTER AND JELLY!" Oh the horror! How could we make her grilled cheese! But we let her protest. We respected the sharing of her opinion, but we calmly told her that this was being made for lunch and if she didn't want to eat it, she didn't have to. We put it on her plate with some fruit and veggies and walked out of the room. She ate it.

Let them protest, but don't let their protest change anything about the meal! The minute you give in to any fit or protest is the exact moment you open the door to your kids controlling mealtime.

KEY POINTS...

- ✓ **Don't let your kids call the shots of what you put on their plate. They are not in charge of their health and well-being. You are.**
- ✓ **You are the parent. You provide a balanced, healthy meal on their plate and they can eat it if they want to. If they don't, that's ok. Don't argue about it or discuss it.**
- ✓ **Don't make them anything else. They can decide to eat when they get hungry enough.**

TRY THIS...

The next time your child protests about the food on their plate, don't talk about it. If they don't eat it, just clear their plate and excuse them from the table.

OVERWHELMING KIDS WITH QUESTIONS

DO YOU WANT THIS OR THAT?

Remember that kids are not in charge of what goes on their plates. Let's not put them in the place of authority by asking them a bunch of questions about what they want and don't want. They don't know what's best for them. Nor do they understand the importance of a healthy balance of food for growth, digestion, brain function, or focus. Allowing our kids to share their opinions is a wonderful thing, but not at mealtimes (or at least not when it comes to the healthy stuff at mealtime). We guarantee if we asked our kids if they wanted vegetables on their plates, they would always say "no", but if we don't even give them the option and it's just there with no discussion, they will most likely choose to eat it. Healthy food always goes on their plates whether they like it or not. Sometimes kids will just have an opinion **just to have an opinion**. Remember that we are the parents. We are also in charge of planning, buying, organizing and distributing the food in the household. We put the food on their plates without any questions. We control the portions. We make sure that there is a healthy balance of food--fruits, vegetables, grains, dairy, and protein. Then it's their choice whether or not they want to eat it. No discussions and more importantly no questions asked!

OPTION CLOSE

We aren't saying to *never* ask questions. Every once in a while it's ok to give kids a couple of choices, but always option close. Give them only two choices: "Do you want ketchup or barbeque sauce?" "Do you want sweet corn or asparagus?" That's ok. If the questions are about the meal you've already fixed or if it's just about condiments, that's great to give kids those kinds of choices. Allowing kids some choices on their vegetable is an awesome way to empower them to choose which vegetable they like the best. We're not changing anything about the meal that we have provided, we are just giving them a little say-so in what they want.

IN OUR HOME...

- Just as an experiment, we asked our daughter if she wanted veggies. Of course, she said "No." (See, we told you). Now, we could have listened to her and not put any vegetables on her plate and denied her body of getting the very important vitamins and minerals that it needs. Or we could have just put them on her plate anyway and let her decide---which is exactly what we did. We said, "We'll put them on your plate and then you can decide if you want to eat them." We didn't talk about the veggies again. She ate them.
- We can't tell you how many times our children cry about something that we're going to put on their plate—sometimes huge protests which is just ridiculous. We put it on their plate anyway and just don't talk about it. We don't make an issue. We don't say: "You're going to eat this, and you're going to like it!" We don't even acknowledge it whatsoever except for maybe "We understand. You don't have to eat it." We always reassure them that it's their choice. We aren't going to battle it. There is no power

struggle. We don't say much. We just let our kids protest as we all sit down at the table and pray a blessing of gratitude over our food and talk about our day. We don't focus on the food at all. We just talk and spend time as a family. Nine times out of ten, they eat it because they choose to eat it because it's on their plate. Not because we make them.

If you limit the questions you ask, you limit the number of negative responses you get at mealtime. It's so nice *not* to hear them!

KEY POINTS...

- ✓ **Don't ask your kids questions about everything you're going to put on their plate.**
- ✓ **Make their plate with proper portions and a healthy balance of fruits, vegetables and protein.**
- ✓ **If you do give them options, give them only two, but never change the meal you've fixed!**

TRY THIS...

Don't ask your child one question about the food you are putting on their plate at dinner tonight. Not one question.

GIVE KIDS THE POWER

DON'T BATTLE, BEG, OR BRIBE

I know we just said that our kids are not in charge. Now, we're saying to give kids the power. Let us explain...

Our goal shouldn't be to make our kids eat food because we are commanding that they do it. Our goal shouldn't be to "hide" fruits or vegetables in the meal without their knowledge. Our goal should be that they choose to eat the healthy food because it's the best choice for their bodies. Eating certain foods shouldn't be demanded. In fact, food shouldn't even be the topic of conversation. Again, remember our original goal: Teaching kids to make healthy choices, being grateful for the food that is on our plates and spending time together!

Try to avoid "policing the plates"---battling that one last bite of veggies, begging them to eat one more bite of chicken, or bribing them to eat that last bite of potatoes before they can have dessert. Let us share what we believe that does...it takes away their power. Kids want power. They are in charge of very little in their lives and if they notice that mealtime is a time for them to be in control and show their "rank" over us, then they will do it. They will be stubborn. They will complain. They will whine and cry and soak up every ounce of attention they get from us and every amount of energy that they drain from us. Remember that we are not talking about giving kids the power to choose what goes on their plate. That's our job--to put the healthy food and balanced portions on their plate. But then we have to give them the power to decide to make the right choice and eat what is on their plates...on their own...without force.

MORE, MORE, MORE!

If we want kids to eat what is on their plates then we have to just put a healthy balance of food there and leave them alone! If they want more of something, try to avoid saying "eat one more bite of this first." Kids will rebel just to rebel. Just give them a little more of what they ask for and leave them alone. Give them time to work on the rest of their plate without any hovering.

FROM OUR HOME...

- Our daughter loves bread. Sometimes, that's all she wants to eat, but we still put everything else on her plate along with the bread. When she has had plenty of bread, we say "There's no more bread for tonight." We don't lie and say we're out of bread when we're not. Being honest is so important. Kids know when we are lying! We don't say anything else, but "there's no more bread for tonight." Or we say "We are saving that bread for another meal." She may protest, but that's ok. Food in our house isn't endless. There are limits and we set them. Limiting the amount of bread she eats without making an issue of other food on her plate, allows her to decide to eat the rest when she's ready.
- My youngest son always wants more pizza or pasta without eating his salad. Instead of making him finish his salad first which would only turn into a battle, we just give him a little more pasta and leave him alone. Sometimes, we say "Yes, you can have more pizza

in a minute. You have other things on your plate you can eat while you're waiting." We don't name anything specific that he needs to eat, we are just simply acknowledging that he has other food and then giving him the space and time to choose to eat it. There is a big difference between "Finish your salad first." which gives us the power that he will rebel against and "If you'd like, you can work on other things on your plate while you wait for more pasta." which gives him the power. Big difference.

If you're having it for dinner, it's going on their plate. Give your kids the power to decide if they want to eat it or not from there. It's that simple. Don't make an issue out of it and it won't become an issue.

KEY POINTS...

- ✓ **When kids don't eat their food, it's more about control than it is about not liking the food.**
- ✓ **Let kids eat at their own pace and if they want more of something, it's ok to give them more even if they haven't finished something else first.**
- ✓ **If you want your kids to eat then you absolutely cannot spend your time and energy focusing on making them eat. Focus on family at the table and not the food!**

TRY THIS...

Tonight at dinner, don't talk about food at all! Not one word. Talk about their day, their ups and downs, and how they showed kindness and love.

DESSERT: THE FORBIDDEN FOOD

DON'T RANK DESSERT HIGHER THAN OTHER FOOD

“Finish your carrots or you won't get a sucker” is a powerful strategy for getting kids to eat their healthy food. It works! However, something we've observed is that, although this is a brilliant tactic, it also ranks the sucker higher than the carrots.

Although this method does make our kids eat their carrots, is that our goal? Do we want to make our kids eat healthy or do we want them to choose to eat healthy on their own? Do we want our kids to eat healthy just so they can get the treat...the forbidden sugar or do we want them to eat healthy because they know that the carrots are better for their bodies than anything else? Do we want to unknowingly put a higher value on that sugary treat than on the healthy carrots or do we want them to value the nutrition that the healthy carrots gives them and realize that the sucker is no big deal?

I know this next idea may seem odd, but we suggest that if you're going to give kids a treat after lunch, why not just put it right on their plate so they can eat it whenever they want? Otherwise, don't give them a treat at all.

PUNISHMENT OR REWARD? HOW ABOUT NEITHER!

If kids don't finish all the food on their plate, taking away dessert shouldn't be the punishment. If we're going to have dessert that night, they should still get dessert no matter what they eat or don't eat. Again, we realize that may sound weird, but anytime we punish with food, we are robbing our kids of the power they need to decide what is best for their bodies. If we continuously rank dessert above healthy foods than that's what they are going to crave the most.

If a dessert is a special treat then everyone should get it. We still put healthy food on their plate and enjoy mealtime. If they don't finish every crumb, it's not a big deal. Again, food is not a battle or a discussion. We have given them the option to eat healthy food and if we are giving them the option to eat dessert too, they should be able to eat it. If we start seeing a trend of not finishing healthy food then dessert isn't an option at all. We don't tell them that of course. We just don't have dessert. We avoid saying things like “because you didn't finish your meal, you don't get any dessert.”

Food should not be a punishment. Rewarding kids with food is no better. We aren't talking about rewarding for potty training or the occasional waiting-in-line-sucker-to-the-rescue, but using food to control behavior all of the time...every minute of the day...isn't the best strategy. Behavior and food shouldn't go hand in hand. “If you clean up your toys, you'll get a sucker.” Not a great idea.

FROM OUR HOME...

- We do a lot of experiments with food in our house. Several times, we have put a treat right on our kids' plates just to see what they would eat first. At first, they would eat the

treat first and that was ok, because they would always eat the rest of their meal too. Now, if we do give them a treat with their meal, they often choose to save it for last. It's interesting what happens when we give kids the power to choose...as long as we are giving them the power to choose from healthy food we put on their plates...with a little treat on the side.

Healthy food isn't a punishment. Desserts are not a reward. You have the power to change the focus in your family and teach your kids to eat healthy because it's the best choice for their body not because they will get a treat for it.

KEY POINTS...

- ✓ **Yes, dessert is special but it's not more important than eating the healthy food on their plate.**
- ✓ **By making kids finish something before they can eat dessert, you are putting dessert up on a "food pedestal."**
- ✓ **Food shouldn't be a punishment nor a daily reward.**

TRY THIS...

Put a healthy meal on your child's plate with their after dinner treat and see if they eat it first or save it for later.

OH, YOU DON'T LIKE PEAS!

DON'T CLAIM THEIR DISLIKE

Kids' opinions change about food like the weather changes in the Midwest, so never claim their dislike. Don't say it out loud. Don't say "You don't like peas." Or "You won't eat your broccoli." Once they hear us say it, they will get it into their head that they don't like it and they will never try it again. Then, you will have to add that food to the already long list of foods they have claimed not to like and your mealtime options get smaller and smaller.

Kids' opinions constantly change. One day they may love something. The next day they may not. If we quit feeding our kids food that they claimed they didn't like, we would be in trouble because they've pretty much claimed to dislike everything at one point or another. We just keep putting it on their plate whether they like it or not and never talk about it. Again, nine times out of ten, they eat it even after just screaming about how much they didn't like it.

As parents, one of the most important things we can do is let our kids share their opinions if they have them. We don't *ask* their opinion about food. We don't allow their opinion to change what food goes on their plates. We don't try to talk them out of their opinions. We just let them dislike something all they want, but we stay strong. It doesn't change what we put on their plate. We just listen to them. Understand them. Respect them. We let them get their complaints all out, but if we're having it for dinner, it's going on their plate.

FROM OUR HOME...

- Our daughter claimed she hated stir fry, but that didn't stop us from making it for dinner. We never said it out loud "Oh you don't like stir fry." No, we just kept making it, and for about **a year**, she would pick at it and not eat much of it. Until one day, she ate it and ate it all and has been eating stir fry ever since! If stir fry is what's for dinner then they will either eat it or not. We don't even talk about it.
- Our youngest cried and cried because he said he hated asparagus and didn't want any asparagus. We listened. We understood his angst. But we didn't make a big deal about it or pay much attention to him during this episode. We put asparagus on his plate anyway and he ended up eating all of it and asking for more.

Don't worry too much about their negative opinions about food. When your kids make a healthy eating choice, encourage them. Cheer them on. "Awesome job. Your body says 'thank you!'". You have the power to help them develop positive eating habits that will last a lifetime.

KEY POINTS...

- ✓ **Never claim their dislike. Don't say it out loud. Sometimes kids just need to complain about something.**
- ✓ **Listen to them. Let them share their opinions. Don't argue.**
- ✓ **Encourage your kids when they make healthy choices!**

TRY THIS...

Go around the table and have your kids share all the healthy foods that your kids like. Make a list of these foods and add them to your shopping list!

YOU'RE ONE DAY OLDER NOW

EMPOWERING KIDS WITH AGE

By far, this has been one of our most powerful strategies in encouraging our kids to try and keep trying healthy food even if they don't like it (or claim not to one day.) Let kids share their opinions about food, but keep putting it on their plate. Keep encouraging them to try it every day because **they are one day older!** Teaching kids to understand that as they get older, their tastes in food will change can be incredibly helpful. If we let them share their opinion and keep putting it on their plate anyway, and keep encouraging them to try it because they are one day older, then they may realize that they do like it. We've seen it happen over and over and over around our dinner table. Encourage them when they do eat it! Not in an "I told you so" kind of way, but in a "Great job. You made a good choice for your body" kind of way. Empowering kids to try new foods because they are older gives them the power to choose whether they like that food or not. It's ok that they still don't like it. Be proud of them for trying it again anyway!

FROM OUR HOME...

- I (Christine) have hated sweet potatoes since I was a little girl and threw up sweet potatoes. Every year, on Thanksgiving, I try them because I'm older. And every year, I don't like them. But I'm setting an example for my kids. Plus, I've learned that I do like sweet potato fries, sweet potato chips, and roasted sweet potatoes. And even though I still don't like them plain or with marshmallows and pineapple (yuck), I still try them each and every time and my kids are watching.
- Our daughter aka "the picky one" didn't like roasted red peppers. We kept putting them on her plate and having her try them again because she was one day older and she kept not liking them. The portions we put on her plate kept getting smaller and smaller, but she kept trying them and not liking them, but one day, she tried them and liked them! It was so exciting, but the next time we had them, she didn't like them again. Oh well, again, the power is in her hands and we just keep encouraging her on the days she does like them.
- We never let any food go to waste either. Anything that anyone doesn't like gets divided up between the rest of us or gets saved for them to try it the next day...when they are a day older! (As much as we can't stand wasting food, if there is sneezing or snot near the food whatsoever, it's gone!) Sometimes this strategy makes our kids want to eat the food themselves instead of sharing it with their siblings or with us!

Remember that oftentimes food is about control. When you empower your kids to decide if they like something or not because they are a day older now, it helps them feel really important.

KEY POINTS...

- ✓ **Encourage kids to try foods over and over because they are one day older.**
- ✓ **Never make them feel badly if they still don't like a food. "It's ok. We can try again tomorrow. Maybe you'll like it then when you're a day older."**
- ✓ **Don't waste food that kids don't like. Just eat it yourself or give it to siblings.**

TRY THIS...

Fix something that you like to eat but have stopped fixing because your kids didn't like it. Encourage your kids to try it tonight because they are older now and see what happens.

THE KID THAT USED TO EAT EVERYTHING

WHAT HAPPENED?

Have you ever said to yourself “My kid used to eat everything. What happened?” Well, they are normal. The boycotting of food isn’t a matter of “if” our kids will do it, it’s a matter of “when” they will do it. All three of our kids at one point protested about food...even some of their previous favorites. It’s so confusing. They would like something one day and then scream that we were putting it on their plate the next. We’ve learned that this is normal. Don’t stress about it. Your kids will gripe too! So the kid who never complained about anything just may start. Stay strong. Every so often, kids will test us to see if we are going to continue to stand firm, so continue to stand firm each and every time they protest. Continue to put healthy food in balanced portions on their plate and continue to find ways to encourage them to make those healthy choices.

STILL REFUSING TO EAT

Even with all of the strategies we’ve shared, our kids still test us, and we have had to find new ways to guide them in making the right choices without turning food into a battle. We certainly don’t always do things perfectly. Our kids still complain sometimes about their food, but we take it very seriously. We continue to encourage them to be grateful for whatever is on their plate, and we remind them all the time that if they don’t like it, they don’t have to eat it. We say constantly “try it now that you’re a day older.” It is hard work trying to conquer this whole mealtime thing!

FROM OUR HOME...

- When our daughter began to boycott her vegetables over and over and over. We had to come up with some further strategies. Ugh. No matter what we did or said, she would continue to leave them on her plate and we would continue to divide them up between ourselves and her brothers, but we could only stand this so much. It was so hard not to battle or bargain with her, so we had to think of something else.
 1. We remind her that her body needs those healthy vegetables.
 2. If that doesn’t work, we take some time to look up the health benefits of that food and read it as a family. We discuss why eating that food is important to her body.
 3. Once we have discussed that her body needs that food and looked up the health benefits of that food (which oftentimes are to prevent cancer and heart disease, aid in digestion, increase brain function, lower blood pressure, etc.), we let her decide if she wants her body to benefit from those things or if she wants to give those benefits to her brothers. So far, 100% of the time, she chooses to eat it. But the key is that it’s her choice! We give her the power to decide what she wants to do.
- Our almost three year old screamed because I was putting apples on his plate. I told him that he didn’t have to eat them but that I was going to put them on his plate anyway. He

immediately handed the apples to his sister which really frustrated me because I know he likes apples, but I didn't get upset. I just let him give the apples to his sister. I told him that I had some more apple slices on the counter if he changed his mind. I didn't say another word. After he was done with everything on his plate, he asked for some apples. I just thanked him for making a healthy choice for his body and gave him the apples. Again, I didn't make him eat them, it was **his choice** to eat them. I just let him know that they were available to him. This is another very effective strategy to try!

You always have to be thinking and praying about new strategies. You always have to be focused on the goal of healthy, grateful kids, and the appreciation of family time. **Kids are naturally selfish so why not play into their selfish nature! Teach them how food benefits them.**

It is your very important job to teach your kids that food isn't about the battle of the wills, it's about the battle of sickness and disease! God gave us nourishing, healthy foods so that our bodies can be strong and live fearlessly for Him. And if we don't choose to eat healthy foods then our bodies will break down, get sick, and not allow us to run and jump and play and be all that God created us to be! Remember that your goal shouldn't be that your kids eat food because you make them do it. Our goal is to empower them to eat the healthy food because they are grateful for it and it's the right choice to make their bodies healthy.

KEY POINTS...

- ✓ **Your kids will protest about food at some point (or at many points). That's just a fact. Never stop finding new strategies to guide your kids in making healthy food choices.**
- ✓ **Let kids know that if they change their mind, you have the food waiting for them.**
- ✓ **Teach kids the health benefits of eating healthy! They must know why it's important to them!**

TRY THIS...

The next time your child doesn't want to eat something healthy, look up the health benefits together.

THE KID THAT IS STILL UNGRATEFUL

Sometimes it doesn't matter how many times we say that we must be grateful for the food on our plates, we will still get complaints. We can take away their plate for a moment to let them think about it. We can dismiss them from the table to give them some time to reflect on it. We can tell them that there are starving kids in this world who would be so grateful to have any little crumb or imperfect morsel of food that they are dismissing. We can encourage them, empower them, option close them, and look up the health benefits of something all day long, and still, they will show ungratefulness! It can be so frustrating.

Honestly, we got to a point where we didn't know what to do. We felt that we had mastered getting kids to eat the food, but we were at a standstill for how to help them be more grateful for it and stop complaining about it...especially with our oldest. When he started kindergarten, he went through a very ungrateful food phase. It didn't matter what we did or said. We were getting angry about his whining at mealtime about his food and we were determined to put an end to it. We felt that his heart towards food needed to be changed...not by force, but by prayer and service! Here's what we did...

FROM OUR HOME...

- We want our kids to be grateful for their food. We want them to know that there are starving people in this world, but talking about it and showing them pictures of starving people just wasn't enough. They needed to experience it. And our oldest, who at the time, was known as "Complainy Complainer" was the first up. I (Christine) took him with me to serve a meal to the homeless. We had a little heart-to-heart before we went to let him know not to stare or point, not to ask questions loudly, but to be friendly and smile and to be helpful and kind. He stood beside me as each person passed by holding out their plate. We smiled and served them looking each person in the eye with love and respect. On our drive home, we had another heart-to-heart. My son had questions about their dirty, shaky hands, their ripped clothing, and their missing teeth. So we talked and talked. The best part was that he noticed their gratefulness! They were so appreciative of anything we put on their plate. They came back for seconds and thanked us over and over. After that day, my son stopped complaining at mealtime, and he and I continue to volunteer together at the homeless dinner twice a year. His heart was changed that day. It wasn't our job to force him to be grateful, but it was our job to teach him to be grateful by giving him a glimpse of the "real world"—the world outside himself so he could have a better understanding when we talked about why we should be so grateful. And not only was my son more grateful for the food on his plate, but he was also more grateful for a comfortable house, a warm bed, a clean bathtub, and a toothbrush.

You can tell your kids to appreciate food, but you can't make them do it. It has to be implanted into their own hearts through experience. Their eyes need to be opened to the bigger world out there. Food isn't something to grumble and mumble about. It isn't something to protest and be picky about. It's something to be grateful for because so many in this world don't have it. Yes, telling kids this information can be helpful, but allowing them to experience it for themselves can be life-changing!

KEY POINTS...

- ✓ **Sometimes no matter what you do or say, your kids will still be ungrateful about food.**
- ✓ **Talk to them about the fact that so many people in this world don't have any food.**
- ✓ **Better yet, let them experience it for themselves. Allow them to be around those who are less fortunate than they are.**

TRY THIS...

Volunteer together. Find a way for you and your kids to serve others in your local community—a homeless dinner, a homeless shelter, Special Olympics, Meals on Wheels, or your local food pantry.

OTHER TRICKS UP OUR SLEEVE

Parenting is exhausting. We always have to be one step ahead and have even more tricks up our sleeves. Here are some other helpful tips that we have used...

- **NATURE’S CANDY:** Kids love candy! Why not give that love for candy a new spin. Fruit in our house is called “nature’s candy”. The kids love it because God makes so many yummy, sweet foods that we are meant to enjoy as much as--if not more than--candy. Sometimes we save the fruit from our meal for the “dessert.” We do that a lot. “We’re having ‘nature’s candy’ tonight as a snack.” And we’ll serve some watermelon or strawberries with milk. We’ve also discovered that mangoes and kumquats are really tasty and sweet and the kids love to eat them—especially when we call them “nature’s candy!”
- **NATURE’S POWER:** Vegetables in our house are called “nature’s power”. We teach them that vegetables give your bodies vitamins and minerals and the power to run and jump and play basketball and dance. The boys love this.
- **TIMING:** Meals and snacks should be on a regular schedule as much as possible. Every 2-3 hours, our kids eat something small and healthy (most of the time).
- **SNACKS:** Snacks in our country have invaded our lives. They are only meant to tide kids over for the next meal—not replace the meal completely. We don’t give our kids a snack unless it’s going to be at least two hours until their next meal. Nothing will take away a healthy mealtime appetite than a snack too close to mealtime. Keep snack portions small, low in sugar, and on a regular schedule. Snack time is not all day long either. If you notice your child isn’t eating full, healthy meals, most likely their snack is the culprit.
- **JUICE:** Juice can do the same thing as snacks. They are high in sugar and can fill up a belly and not leave room for healthy, nourishing foods.
- **APPETIZER:** Give kids a vegetable as their appetizer---carrots and dip, a salad, etc. I love this trick. It’s an “oldie but goodie”. Remember they are most hungry at the beginning of the meal, so that’s a great time to encourage them to eat vegetables!
- **MEAL-PLANNING:** Encourage kids to be a part of the meal-planning process. Allow them to share ideas of what fruits or vegetables you should buy and allow them to give you meal ideas. Giving them two healthy meal options to choose from is helpful so you don’t get ideas like “Let’s eat popcorn!”

RELAX AND JUST EAT

You're probably thinking "Yeah, right! Relax and just eat...whatever!" Seriously, mealtimes can be relatively relaxing—especially if there's no food battles or complaining. Remember that the goal is to be grateful and enjoy time as a family. There will be requests for more and inevitably someone will drop a utensil, but here are some ideas to make the demanding-serving-getting-up-and-down time at your table a little bit more relaxing.

- **NO FOOD BATTLES:** We hope we've made our point so far that we don't talk about food. We don't argue about it. We don't discuss who is eating what or who is not eating what. We are not the food police. We are their parents and we want to have fun and just get to know our kids better at mealtime.
- **NO SECONDS OR THIRDS:** Sometimes we say this because we just don't have enough for everyone to have seconds. Sometimes we say this when we need to save the seconds for a second meal. Sometimes we say this when they've been given a healthy plate of food with plenty of food on it and don't need any more, and sometimes we say this when we just want to relax and not get up and down 50 times to get seconds and thirds. Whatever is on their plate is what they get. They are to be grateful for it and be done when they are done.
- **NO RUNNING AROUND:** We just want to sit and enjoy our meal and not get up and run around getting everything everyone needs all the time. Yes, we want our family to know that we love them and we absolutely want to take care of them and serve them, but there is nothing wrong with teaching them the phrase: "While you're up..." How many times do you sit down and then another kid asks for something that you could have gotten while you were up one of the other sixty times? Teaching our kids to say "While you're up, will you get me some..." has been so helpful. We want them to feel loved and served, but we also want them to respect our needs to sit and enjoy our meal too. Another good one is "Please wait to be asked if you want more of something."
- **NO HELPLESSNESS:** If they drop a spoon and need another one...if they need a napkin...if they need something that they can do themselves, we take the time to teach them how to get what they need and then encourage them to do it themselves when they ask for it. Not in a "get it yourself" angry kind of way, but in a more empowering "you are old enough to get this all by yourself" kind of way.
- **NO GUILT FOR WATCHING A MOVIE:** Watching TV is not an every night event. It is for special occasions and we do it as a family. But sometimes, when it's been a busy week or we just need time to connect, we put a movie on in another room for a special kids' movie night while we have a quiet conversation at the table by ourselves. We have no guilt over this whatsoever because with three kids, we don't go out on date nights very often and this is a way for us to feel that we have a little time for each other! And it's free!

FUN AROUND THE DINNER TABLE

Somehow our kids and society have been led to believe that everything must be “fun” all the time, but mealtimes aren’t always supposed to be fun. At least, that’s not our main goal as parents, right? The most important part about mealtime is about eating healthy, spending time together as a family, and being grateful for the food on our plates. Sometimes, however, we like to shake things up. We don’t do these things all the time, but it’s certainly fun to surprise our kids with something special to do while we’re eating. Remember that it’s more important to focus on each other than to focus on the food. Here are some ideas to do while sitting around the dinner table together.

- **LET’S LEARN:** Let’s be honest here...sometimes our kids act so silly at mealtimes. There must be some sort of chemical reaction that happens with digestion to cause giggling and the sudden hilariousness of bathroom words. Regardless, at the Leeb house, it was starting to get out of hand. A little silliness is fine, but our kids were crossing the line to being totally disruptive and disrespectful, and we had to put a stop to it. We came up with the idea to let each child choose a mealtime topic for us to discuss and learn about together. We would even get out the laptop and look up questions the kids had about our topic. We all really learned a lot and it turned our mealtime into a time of focused, civil conversation. This idea worked really well until our middle child kept choosing “birds” as her mealtime topic (man, we learned a lot about birds that we didn’t ever know before, but we were ready to move on to a new topic) and so we decided to write down a lot of different topics that they were interested in learning more about and put them in a cup and draw a different one out each time.
- **AND THEN...:** Another idea we do when the talk at mealtime becomes too silly or obnoxious is we attempt to control the crazy a bit by allowing them to tell a crazy story. The fun part is that one person starts a crazy story and says “and then...” which signals to the next person in line to continue the story. That person continues the story for a bit and says “and then...” and passes the story on to the next person. It’s pretty hilarious to see where the story goes—especially with a toddler in the house!
- **WORD POP:** Put a bunch of words in a cup and during mealtime, have someone draw out one word. Go around the table and share the first thing that pops into your mind when you think of that word. It can get pretty silly, but it’s at least “controlled silly.”
- **HIGH/LOW/LOVE:** We usually save these questions for bedtime, but sometimes if we haven’t had a chance to connect at mealtimes, we ask these questions then:
 - What was the best part of your day?
 - What was your least favorite part of your day?
 - How did you show kindness and love today?
- **I LOVE YOU BECAUSE...:** Anytime there’s been a lot of negativity, we take some time to go around the table and share what we love about each other. This is also great for someone’s birthday, Mother’s Day, Father’s Day, Valentine’s Day or really any day we could all use a boost of encouragement.

MEALTIME FAMILY TOGETHERNESS

- **NEW FOODS NIGHT:** This is our absolute favorite thing to do for mealtime as a family. Our kids love it. We love it. We hope you love it too! We bring our kids to the store with us to help pick out new foods to try. There are so many amazingly fun, healthy, and interesting fruits and vegetables. When we allow our kids to pick them out, not only are they more likely to try them, but they are 1,000 times more likely to like them. They have ownership in the food item...it's "theirs". Our kids love picking out new foods to try, and they love trying each other's new foods too. They also love it when we read about the food, find out the health benefits, and figure out how to prepare it. It's a blast. It's a loving, fun, non-threatening way to encourage our kids to try something new. Plus, it's just great family time! We've had so much fun trying dragon fruit, rhubarb, kumquats, kiwano melons, star fruit, cactus pear, passion fruit, yellow beets, and more!
- **SPONTANEOUS PICNIC:** This is always a fun surprise to pack up a picnic for the kids to enjoy for dinner. We usually keep it simple like peanut butter and jelly with chips, veggies, and fruit. Or we will just throw in some cheese sticks, crackers, fruit, and veggies. Oh and a little treat too is always a nice touch (but it is not a reward for finishing their vegetables though! ☺). The best part is that we don't even have to go anywhere...we can just go in our own backyard. We've even set up a blanket on our family room floor. But they do love it when we take them to a park so we can all eat together and then run around and play together.
- **NEW RECIPE NIGHT:** As a family, we look at new recipes online or in a cook book. We vote on which recipe we will try. Then, we go buy and prepare the meal together! It's a great way to have some family time, try something new together, and share opinions together.
- **FAMILY MOVIE NIGHT:** Family movie night isn't just to make meals more relaxing for us, it's also to make mealtime more fun as a family! This is our kids' favorite time. We will set up a little kids' table in the family room and let them watch a movie while they eat. We usually have to stop and take an intermission where we clean up, put them in their pajamas, and let them pick out a special treat. Then we all finish the movie together. I've never seen the kids eat so quietly than when they watch a movie.

DON'T GIVE UP

If our vision of mealtimes is to make healthy balanced meals and sit around the table and eat as a family without complaints, then we can't give up. We cannot let our kids run mealtimes and ruin mealtimes. Mealtimes are not meant to be crazy. They are meant to be a time to gather and eat and talk and laugh and be grateful for anything and everything that gets put on our plate. If our child screams all the time because we keep putting something on her plate that she doesn't like...it's ok. We keep putting it on her plate and keep encouraging her to try it because she's a day older now. Then, we respect her decision to continue not liking it. It's annoying, but trust us. If our children complain about the food that is on their plate, they don't have to eat it and we don't have to talk about it. It's such a relief. Once the focus of mealtime shifts to spending time together instead of focusing on what our kids eat and don't eat, we will soon find that they will eventually eat what is on their plates.

FROM OUR HOME...

- Just tonight, we watched our youngest pick every single roasted red pepper out of his fajita. We were puzzled because he normally ate roasted red peppers, but we didn't say a word. We just observed him. He asked for more bean dip and we gave him some. He asked for more chips and we gave him some. Again, he asked for more bean dip and more chips...meanwhile every roasted red pepper was sitting on the side of his plate. We fought every urge to tell him to eat his roasted red peppers before he got anymore chips, but we didn't. We just gave him a tiny bit more bean dip and two more chips and told him that was all and we continued talking as a family. Eventually, we noticed that one at a time, he put every single one of those roasted red peppers in his mouth. Had we asked him to do it...had we made him to do it...it would have been a battle and most likely those roasted red peppers would have gone to waste, but he ate every single one.
- We love black bean soup, but our daughter doesn't. She never has, but we keep making it and keep hoping that she will eat it someday. She will pick at it, and she will eat the chips and cornbread that go along with the black bean soup, but not the black bean soup. She will eat the sour cream off of the top as well as the cheese, but she will just poke at the black bean soup. Each time, even though she is a day older, she doesn't like it. We have to be honest that we are getting very frustrated with it, but we never argue about it. We never talk about it. We never claim it. We never ask her questions about it. We never take away dessert if she doesn't eat it. She just won't eat it. Still to this day...

And that's ok. We just divide it up between her brothers each and every time. If she misses one meal, she will live. And what a blessing that is to know that another meal or snack is right around the corner. We are so incredibly blessed beyond measure. So, we continue to make black bean soup and she continues to not eat it. Oh well. We are not giving up though. We will keep making it and keep having her try it because she's a day older and maybe...just maybe, she will like it one day.

Stay strong. It's so important that you don't give up on this mealtime mission. If you stick to it no matter how much your children protest, soon you will find that there will be a shift in focus at

mealtime. There will be more time for talking and togetherness than griping and ungratefulness. You will be setting up a pattern that will prayerfully last a lifetime and be passed on to their families too! It is worth it to think that your sacrifice and dedication to mealtime now could result in raising kids who grow up to be healthy adults who are grateful for anything on their plates and enjoy spending time with their family at mealtime too.

It is our prayer that your entire focus at mealtime from now on will be on your family—being healthy, being grateful, and being together!

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Bradley and Christine Leeb are passionate about family and have over thirty years of combined public school teaching experience. They have been married for over 16 years. Though near divorce in 2009, they have fought to stay together, and through that process have grown individually and as a couple. They are both in their forties and live in central, Illinois with their three young children, their dog, and their turtle. They find humor in the small things, love to quote TV shows and movies, look forward to traveling together again someday, and have a blast laughing at the joys and the “uh ohs” of their family life.

Christine is a motivational speaker and is the founder of an educational ministry called 4Real Moms—providing moms and families with real solutions for real life. Bradley is an elementary music teacher and professional photographer. They also wrote a playful ebook for couples called [Best In-Home Date Nights That Don't Involve the TV.](#)

Other resources by Christine:

Meal-Planning for the Mom Who Hates Meal-Planning

Blessed in the Mess: How to Keep Your Home Clean (Sort of) and Your Kids Content (Most of the Time)

22 Ways to Love Your Husband Like a Boyfriend Again

In His Light: Facing Fear with Faith