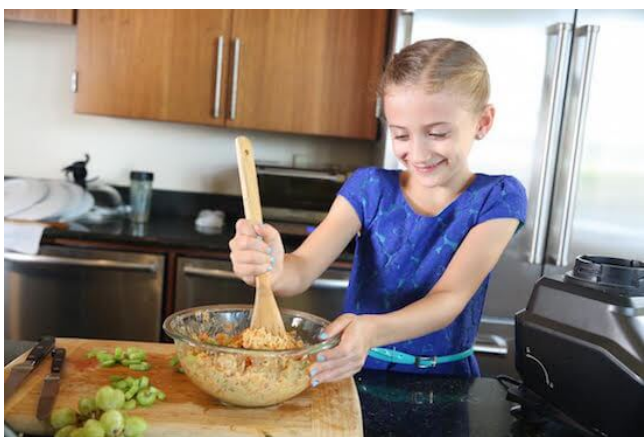




Helping Your Kids Be Whole-Food, Plant-Based Rock Stars

By Cory Warren
2017-06-16 12:46:24



Sometimes I imagine our dinner table as a rock ‘n’ roll concert stage. The stage is set, the lights are on, and moments before the crowd (consisting of my three kids) enters, I take a deep breath and look at the hard work that I have completed. The perfectly balanced, whole-food, plant-based masterpiece that I call dinner ... is ready. I open the doors to the arena. This arena, however, is our home. And even though the dinner table “stage” is set, and everything is in its place, oftentimes my audience gives me the equivalent of boos when their healthy meal hits the table. “What did I do wrong?” I ask myself, as I try not to get too upset that my kids don’t like the super nutritious meal that I have prepared for them.

As families, our journey to a whole-food, plant-based diet can be very simple or extremely challenging. We all want our kids to eat more whole grains, fruits, veggies, nuts, seeds, and greens. But even though we know that they are the healthiest thing for us, some plant-based foods can be a challenge to get our kids to eat. So what do we do? How do we help them “see the light,” while at the same time transitioning into a lifestyle that might be completely different from what they’ve always known? How do we help them understand that even if they’re not eating the same things as their friends, it’s OK?

Vegan Shopping Strategies

As a busy parent to three young children, I have found that a healthy combination of education and what I call “parental marketing” helps my kids connect to the food they are eating and the health benefits associated with it. For instance, every great plant-based meal starts at the grocery store or at our local farmer’s market. My children are young, but regardless of their age, your kids will connect more with the food on their plates if they are involved in its preparation from the start.

My Generation Z kids have never known a world without computers, so as you can imagine, they love technology. The only time I will let them even touch my mobile phone is when we are in the grocery store. They love to use the [Forks Over Knives Recipe App](#) to check off items on our shopping list as we go. Two of them are old enough to handle this by themselves, so they take turns pressing the check button to mark each item off of our list. This makes our shopping experience fun, productive, and also gives them a chance to work together. Think of your shopping list as the set list for your rock ‘n’ roll show, and have your stars check the items off as you go!

Plant-Based Cooking with Kids

How do you use your little chefs to help you in the kitchen? There are lots of great kid-safe knives, utensils, and jobs that even the littlest of hands can help with. If you don’t feel comfortable with your kids cutting, have them pour some of the spices into the dish and help mix. While you are working with them in the kitchen, make up a song about what you’re doing. You make the beat and they make the lyrics, or vice versa. If there is ever an opportunity for their hands to get dirty touching the food you are preparing, let them do it. We find that Ann and Jane Esselstyn’s [Big Bean Soup](#) is a fun one to make because before we dice the sweet potatoes, the kids poke them with a fork, per the directions. They love that. Your little sous chefs will be much more likely to enjoy the food they eat if they have a hand in making it. After all, true rock stars always participate in a sound check before the main event.

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June 16 2017

A hands-on approach is helpful, but actually talking about the benefits of each food can give your kids the education and confidence they'll need if friends say negative things about their lunch being different from the "usual" pizza, fries, and burgers. For instance, when we make the Big Bean Soup recipe, we like to mention that the sweet potatoes are packed with beta carotene, which our bodies convert into vitamin A. What does beta carotene help with? Eyesight! Another beneficial nutrient in sweet potatoes is Vitamin C. Ask your kids what other food they know that is orange and has Vitamin C in it. This knowledge is key to helping them take the plant-based journey with you.

Now let's talk about the fun stuff. Your little rock stars want to be cool. They might not know it yet, but there is nothing cooler than eating this way. We all know that beans are packed with protein, so after they take a bite of a bean and veggie burrito, have them flex their muscles. Explain to your kids how they are getting a wonderful amount of protein and nutrients with each and every bite, which gives them the fuel to exercise and help their muscles grow big and strong like their favorite superhero!

Eating at home is easy, but oftentimes when we go out to eat at a school function, restaurant, or friend's birthday party, our little rock stars can have a tough time. Head to these functions prepared and ready for the challenge. Take a quick look at the menu on the restaurant's website before you sit down, so you can be ready to go! Talk to your kids about what they want and help them pick foods that will keep their plant-based lifestyle going strong. Most importantly, maintain close communication with your children's teachers at school. Let them know that your children eat this way and that you would love to work with them throughout the year to make sure they feel included.

With the right combination of marketing, education, communication, and hands-on experience, your kids will have the tools they need to become lean, green eating machines. If you haven't already, make sure to check out the [Forks Over Knives Family](#) cookbook; it has many family friendly recipes that your busy brood is sure to love. When the food hits the table, you'll turn those jeers into cheers. Keep on going that extra mile for your lean, green family. You might even end up getting a rock star standing ovation, or starring in your own plant-based music video (like the one below)!