

Food Fights

Winning the
Nutritional
Challenges of
Parenthood
Armed With
Insight,
Humor, and
a Bottle of
Ketchup

Second Edition



LAURA A. JANA, MD, FAAP, AND JENNIFER SHU, MD, FAAP

American Academy of Pediatrics

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WHAT PEOPLE ARE SAYING

*Another fantastic guide from Drs Jana and Shu! **Food Fights** helps parents find a realistic middle ground between what their child *should* be eating and what their child is actually willing to consume.*

Lisa Singer Moran

Senior Editor, Pregnancy and Parenting at iVillage.com, and former executive editor, *Baby Talk* magazine

***Food Fights** should be mandatory reading for anyone responsible for feeding an infant, toddler, or young child. In their characteristically easy-to-read, humorous fashion, these two pediatrician moms have created the perfect tool to help parents and caregivers instill healthy eating habits, avoid temper tantrums, dodge flying vegetables and, above all else, maintain a healthy attitude toward the nutritional challenges of parenthood!*

Tanya Remer Altmann, MD, FAAP

Author, *Mommy Calls: Dr. Tanya Answers Parents' Top 101 Questions About Babies and Toddlers* and Associate Medical Editor, *Caring for Your Baby and Young Child: Birth to Age Five*

Encouraging, compassionate, and clear for its compelling nutrition messages, this book will be a comprehensive source of information for any parent trying to guide their children to healthy eating habits and lives. I especially like how the up-to-date nutrition information is translated into real-life situations.

Connie Guttersen, RD, PhD

Author, *The Sonoma Diet*

***Food Fights** will help end the war and provide peace at the dinner table! The authors—who are pediatricians and moms—serve up an optimistic, yet realistic, practical tool for all parents trying to do their best in cultivating healthy, wise eaters. From the picky eater to the overeater, *Food Fights* will inform you with the science you need to make great decisions when planning, prepping, and ultimately sharing meals with your children. Gobble it up!*

Wendy Sue Swanson, MD, MBE, FAAP

Mother, pediatrician, and @SeattleMamaDoc blogger for Seattle Children's Hospital

*As pediatricians and moms, Drs Jana and Shu know that it's important to focus on good nutrition, but also to pick your battles. *Food Fights* offers reassuring and practical advice for parents who are worried about whether their kids are eating too much, not enough, or nothing green.*

Diane Debrovner

Deputy Editor, *Parents* magazine

Food Fights presents a no-fuss approach to helping young children develop the healthy eating habits that will see them through a lifetime. Its delightful tone makes it a joy to read, and refer to, over and over again.

Elizabeth M. Ward, MS, RD

Author, *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Feeding Your Baby and Toddler*

*A must-have practical guide for all parents with young children, *Food Fights* offers great solutions on how to promote healthy eating without a struggle.*

Alanna Levine, MD, FAAP

Pediatrician and spokesperson for the American Academy of Pediatrics, and frequent medical guest on *The Early Show* and *TODAY*

Food Fights makes it clear that raising children who are healthy eaters requires good role models for healthy eating. The tips provided throughout the book make it easy for parents to be those healthy role models.

Connie Diekman, MEd, RD, LD, FADA

Nutrition Consultant

Food Fights gives thorough, practical, fun-to-read advice for parents as they tackle some of parenthood's most difficult challenges.

Claire McCarthy, MD, FAAP

Pediatrician, Children's Hospital of Boston; pediatrics instructor, Harvard Medical School; and contributing editor, *Parenting* magazine

*As a pediatrician it's easy for me to lecture parents on healthy eating. When I get home to my own kids, putting all that advice into action is another matter! That's why I'm thrilled Dr Laura Jana and Dr Jennifer Shu have updated their priceless book, *Food Fights*, with even more ideas on how parents can help kids develop great eating habits for life! I wish I could give every parent in my practice a copy of this book and still have one left over to keep in my kitchen at all times.*

David L. Hill, MD, FAAP

Vice President, Cape Fear Pediatrics, Wilmington, NC

Author, *Dad to Dad: Parenting Like A Pro*

We have found that every family has at least one child who is particularly skilled at putting up a formidable food fight. With this in mind, we'd like to dedicate this book to our families' true champions, Sydney L. and Baby G.

—LJ and JS

SECOND EDITION ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Over the past 5 years since we served up the first edition of *Food Fights*, we have become even more committed to and involved in taking on the nutritional challenges of parenthood—in large part because of the great response we’ve gotten from parents and pediatricians alike. In even larger part, we agreed to this second helping of *Food Fights* because from our vantage point, the need is even greater than before. In working with families, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the national media, and in our own communities, we realized there was definitely more work to be done. While all of our original acknowledgments still apply as much now as they did 5 years ago, we would also like to acknowledge the efforts of a few colleagues who have been working tirelessly—both behind the scenes and in the national spotlight—to help parents win the nutritional challenges of parenthood once and for all. To Dr Sandy Hassink (DuPont Children’s Hospital) and Dr Bill Dietz (Director of the Division of Nutrition and Physical Activity at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention): You inspire us. And to Michelle Obama and her Let’s Move Campaign team, as well as every other community- or school-based initiative, along with each and every one of you who is committed to creating healthier generations of children: We’re actively rooting for your success!

FIRST EDITION ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Writing the acknowledgment section of a book is actually much more challenging than one might think. After all—where do you draw the line? As working moms we couldn’t have done it without the help of lots of people: last-minute babysitters, the in-laws who invited our children to come for a visit during our “crunch times,” neighbors who helped keep our driveways shoveled, and good friends who didn’t mistake our self-imposed disappearances as disinterest but rather as overcommitment. To all of them (and you know who you are): We would like to thank you for all of your encouragement and support. That said, we do want to recognize a few of the many fine individuals who helped shape this book.

It seems only appropriate that we start out by recognizing Laura’s mentor, Dr Benjamin Spock. As one of the most influential figures of the 20th century, his insights and commitment to helping raise generations of healthy, happy children continue to serve as an inspiration to us both.

Even beyond the gratitude we have for the unwavering support of our families, friends, and colleagues, we also wanted to give special recognition to Laura's mother, Dr June Osborn. A pediatrician herself, she was convinced early on that this was a book that we needed to write and continually helped motivate us to finish writing it. And when it was—at long last—completed, she read it cover-to-cover to make sure that no “t” was left uncrossed, each “i” was dotted, and that every last split infinitive was reunited (except for the few we were too stylistically attached to to get rid of!).

We also owe special thanks to Dr Tanya Remer Altmann, a wonderful pediatrician and good friend who went above and beyond the collegial call of duty and pored thoughtfully over the many drafts of the manuscript.

As for keeping the true substance of *Food Fights* both practical and realistic, we have to extend our gratitude to all of the children we have had the pleasure of caring for, dining with, and/or the responsibility of feeding, all of whom knowingly (or unknowingly) served as test subjects for our book. A special thanks goes out to our own 4 children, all of whom are now of an age where they can actually read what we've written about them. They have certainly both humored and humbled us over the years. In addition, we appreciate all we've learned from the children we've cared for in our pediatric practices, not to mention those who attend Primrose School of Legacy—Laura's 200-student educational child care center, where the beauty of positive peer pressure is in full force at mealtime and the lunch menu has been known to include everything from cottage cheese, hummus, and spinach to ham-pickle-and-cream-cheese roll-ups.

Now that we have become better acquainted with the inner workings of the publishing world, and we've started actually reading what others write in *their* acknowledgment sections, we would be remiss if we didn't also acknowledge the supportive and hardworking staff in the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) Department of Marketing and Publications, including Maureen DeRosa, Mark Grimes, Jeff Mahony, Kathy Juhl, Kate Larson, and Carolyn Kolbaba. We are well aware of how fortunate we are to be published by the AAP—an organization dedicated to the health of all children starting from the top with Executive Director Dr Errol Alden, to the more than 60,000 grassroots members who make up one of the largest children's health organizations in the world.

And last but not least—when it came to the day-to-day reality of feeding our children (not to mention helping with homework, reading with, and chauffeuring them), we are most grateful to Alex and Ajoy—our selfless husbands who spent a disproportionate amount of their time *doing* it while we were preoccupied with *writing* about it!

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PART I

introduction





CHAPTER 1

food for thought

Why Food Fights?

If you have ever asked yourself just how you are supposed to apply all of the latest dietary directives to your family's everyday life when your child recoils at the slightest hint of something green on her plate or had a hard time even figuring out how to get dinner on the table in the first place, then this is definitely the book for you. If not, we can all but guarantee that you are still going to find plenty of tidbits of helpful advice that will serve your family well. We are convinced that by giving you a bird's-eye view of what you're up against and arming you with some basic insights and some palatable peacekeeping strategies, each and every one of you can win the nutritional challenges of parenthood and play a defining role in shaping your child's lifelong eating habits.

We called this book *Food Fights* for several reasons. First it was because we really wanted people to pay attention to the hugely important topics we're about to discuss, and we figured we'd need a catchy title to get your attention. It's also called *Food Fights* because we hoped that the thought of a good old-fashioned food fight à la the movie *Animal House* would be enough to make you smile, the promise of a discussion of ketchup might be enough to make you chuckle knowingly and, most of all, you'd be more likely to breathe a sigh of relief that you've finally found a book that relates to the *real* nutritional challenges of parenthood. But more fundamentally, it's because it is impossible to ignore the fact that now more than ever, food-related battles rank right at the top of the daily list of parental challenges. They are being waged

in virtually every household in America, and our children's nutritional fortitude clearly depends on their outcome. As both pediatricians and parents, we decided it was high time to march straight to the front lines and mediate—whether that's in your homes, in child care centers across America, on the road, or anywhere else today's children are learning lifelong eating habits.

Under Siege

As parents today we are faced with raising our children in a veritable minefield of dietary trappings and hazardous temptations. Finding them is not a matter of searching, but simply of opening our eyes to their presence in our children's everyday diets, not to mention our own. Over the past several decades, fast-food meals increased from less than 10% to nearly a quarter of all meals consumed. Over this same time span, the percentage of total energy intake from either soda or juice increased nearly 100%, and salty snack intake doubled. Even bagels have been super-sized such that they contain at least 200 calories more than they did 25 years ago. Not surprisingly, the proportion of obese Americans has continued to increase as well.

The Battle of the Bulge

Regardless of how you weigh the facts, it is impossible to look past the estimated one-third of adults (that's more than 70 million people) who are now considered to be obese. At the same time, we know that children with obese parents are as much as 80% more likely to become obese themselves. These numbers confirm what we should have seen coming: An estimated 1 in 5 of our country's children have already followed in their parents' footsteps. Also hard to ignore are the clear health implications of poor nutrition, overweight, and obesity—including high blood pressure, diabetes, heart disease, eating disorders, and stroke, to name but a few.

So why tackle the huge problem of adult obesity in a book about teaching kids healthy eating habits? We hope the answer to this question is as obvious to you as it is to us: Because it's impossible to separate the two. While we had every intention of focusing our attention on the questions parents typically ask that are specific to their kids, we constantly found ourselves discussing eating habits in general. After all, if we as parents can't get our own eating habits and waistlines under control, how is it that we think we will be able to teach our children to do so? Bottom line: Our children stand to take after us in more ways than one, and when it comes to being overweight, they are already lumbering their way up the growth curves (at least for weight) in record numbers.



Weighing the Facts



Since 1980 the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that the number of overweight kids in America has more than tripled. Recent estimates suggest that one-third of children over age 2 are overweight, with nearly 1 in 5 of them obese.

So there you have it—a big-picture view of the battlefield. If that's all there was, it would be a very sobering sight indeed. Yet we are optimistic. If we weren't convinced there are things that each of us can do in our day-to-day approach to feeding our children that will help them steer clear of trouble and come out ahead, we wouldn't have bothered to write this book. Instead of throwing up our hands in surrender, we decided to take a closer look at what each and every one of you can do to prevent your children—and hopefully yourselves—from becoming statistics in this battle of increasing proportions.

Looking Beyond the Substances at Hand

As much as this now seems like it's going to be yet another book on the subject of childhood nutrition, it's not. Well, not exactly anyway. While

we fully intend to provide you with a reality-based approach to your children's nutritional needs and offer plenty of practical information for you to use as you dish up everything from your baby's first foods to your family's meals, this book is first and foremost about teaching, learning, behavior, and development. Because it really doesn't matter if you have a medical degree, a PhD in nutrition, or the best parental intentions in the world if you can't get your child to agree to the rules of engagement—get him to consider giving up his bedtime bottle, give peas a chance, sit for a meal, or open his mouth and try new foods. Unlike so many of the nutrition books out there, this book is as much about applying tried-and-true parenting skills as it is about the actual food. And while it may seem that in the end *Food Fights* is all about winning and losing, it's actually not. Our real goal is to minimize food-related conflicts and take the fight out of food.

Staying Away From Slippery Slopes

One of the problems with parenthood is that nobody ever tells you just exactly when a nutritional necessity, such as a newborn's middle-of-the-night feedings or bedtime bottle, suddenly becomes a bad habit in the making. That's because as with most routines, using food for comfort has a way of easing itself into existence while we're too busy going about our parenting business to notice. While we don't presume to be able to give you an exact timetable of exactly when to stop certain routines before they become ingrained, we do intend to wave some red warning flags at the crest of each of the most predictable slippery slopes of sustenance-turned-habit.

Whetting Your Child's Appetite

We once heard a comment that stuck with us like gum on a shoe: "It's one thing to place good food in front of your child, but it's altogether another to place the appetite for good food in your child's mind." We couldn't agree more. In fact, this astute observation serves as the underpinning for a good portion of what we aim to accomplish with

Food Fights. While plenty of books simply promise recipes for success and put lists of recommended vitamins and minerals at your fingertips, we hope also to whet your appetite and empower you to establish a more holistic approach to teaching your children lifelong healthy eating habits.

We strongly recommend you think of your role this way: You're planting the seeds of your child's future success. As you may have already discovered, teaching children healthy habits doesn't happen overnight, and it's certainly not a one-shot deal. As with just about all tasks that involve nurturing children, you don't just go and plant seeds, take the time to water them, and then get frustrated the next day because there are no plants to show for your efforts. When it comes to modifying your child's behavior, be aware that it takes time and requires cultivation. Although we intend to help guide you down a path of nutritional (and behavioral) enlightenment, we guarantee that it will be a path with its requisite share of cookie crumbs and spilt milk.

Setting the Table = Setting the Stage

It's next to impossible to discuss children's eating habits and nutritional status without taking into account several other factors. Not only do behavior and development play a key role in determining what your child is willing and/or able to accomplish at any given time, but your family's lifestyle stands to be a major influence. As we put together the advice we wanted to offer you in *Food Fights*, we kept wandering away from the table and confronting the entire "stage" of everyday life—everything from fast food and television to work/life issues and hectic lifestyles.

Let's face it, being a parent today can be a bit tricky, and our goal is to point out how some of today's lifestyle challenges stand to impact your family's eating habits. We'll leave it to you to decide what, if anything, you want to change. And lest you start feeling pangs of guilt before you have even passed the introduction portion of the book, please realize that we do not mean to sit in judgment. Let us be the first to admit that

our own schedules don't always allow for family-style meals, that keeping pace with the many demands of parenthood often means that our refrigerators sit empty, our kitchens go underused, and the waitstaff at some of the more family-friendly local restaurants know us by name.



Make Your Meals Family Style



Although it can be challenging for families to consistently eat meals together, recent statistics may make it even more compelling for you to do your best. A large-scale study of nearly 200,000 children and adolescents found that those who eat as a family at least 3 times a week are 12% less likely to be overweight; 20% less likely to eat unhealthy foods (such as soda, fast food, fried foods, or sweets); 24% more likely to eat fruits, vegetables, and other healthy foods; and 35% less likely to have disordered eating habits, such as skipping meals, purging, using diet pills, or smoking cigarettes as a way to reduce weight. In other words, families that dine together thrive together!

A Call to Action

Despite the fact that we have high hopes for putting an end to many of the unnecessary food fights of everyday parenthood, let it be known that we do not believe in force-feeding you a rigid set of rules any more than we believe in force-feeding children. Instead, our call to action is to arm you with the information and inspiration you need to get started. By giving you realistic ways of putting nutritional guidelines into practice, our *Food Fights* plan of attack is designed specifically to help keep your high chairs, family gatherings, and kitchen tables from turning into nutritional battlefields. We have yet to find a parent who wasn't grateful for a battle plan for winning the nutritional challenges of parenthood, and so we're ready to forge ahead and offer you your own plan for success.



CHAPTER 2

war and peace

It's one thing to acknowledge that the childhood obesity epidemic is looming ever nearer and commit to protecting your child in this battle of epic proportions. It's altogether another to find the wherewithal at the end of a long day to appreciate your toddler's unsuccessful but dedicated attempts to feed herself, set aside the bottle or the sippy cup, or stroll calmly down the aisles of the grocery store picking out produce you have the sinking feeling your child will never eat. Knowing what it is you're *supposed* to be doing, buying, and serving is definitely a big step in the right direction. Knowing how to put your plan into action can be a completely different story.

When we first sat down to address the most common dietary dilemmas that parents face and then write about how to successfully anticipate and approach them, we found *ourselves* faced with an unanticipated struggle. We thought it would be easy to separate out and address each individual challenge. Yet each time we tried to direct our attention to a particular food fight—whether it was bedtime bottles, soda pop, green vegetables, or ketchup—we found that the approaches required to address today's wide-ranging battles aren't as unique as you might think. In essence, we found ourselves recommending many of the same strategies over and over again. Instead of risking redundancy, we therefore decided to distill for you the 10 overarching peacekeeping strategies you will need to be a role model for your child in all matters of lifelong healthy eating.

Palatable Peacekeeping Strategies

Strategy #1: Vow Not to Fight Over Food

Half the parental “battle”—and we use the word intentionally because all too often the nutritional responsibilities of everyday parenting life deteriorate quickly into predictable battles—is figuring out how to teach your child healthy eating habits without ending up on opposing sides of the table. Right from the start, vow to yourself that you’re not going to wage war over food—at least not so much that you find yourself worn out, frustrated, and/or feeling like a failure on a regular basis.

Despite the commonplace occurrence of food fights, the fact of the matter is that life’s too short to pick many of these fights. Besides, if you get in the habit of truly fighting with your child over food, studies show that you’re not likely to win in the long run. More often than not, you’re not likely to win in the short run, either. After all, there are few things harder than getting children to open wide when they don’t want to, yet we’ve seen parents continue to try. One of the best things you can do is to commit to some basic ground rules on how you’re going to approach matters of food, and then apply them as calmly and consistently as possible. It’s your job to always make a variety of nutritious foods available to your child, not decide if, when, and how much your child must eat.

Strategy #2: Remind Yourself That It’s Not (Just) About the Bite

The other half of the battle is realizing that eating is not just about eating. It’s about your parental expectations, the stages of your child’s development, and more than a few habits—both good and bad—tossed in along the way. Just because we’re talking about food doesn’t mean that there aren’t a whole host of other factors involved. Feeding children is, in fact, a learning experience for everyone involved. Parents and children alike are bound to bring far more to the table than just food or drink. Sure, understanding the substance at hand is fundamentally important, but it is also vital to grasp the opportunity we have to teach our children healthy *attitudes* toward food and eating.

When it comes to children's unaccepting attitudes toward food, it's critical to recognize that eating is an activity that is particularly susceptible to a child's natural tendency to rebel. Sure, your child's declarations of feeding independence may stand to throw a wrench in your dietary plans, but an occasional rebellion (or even an outright mealtime mutiny) is only to be expected given that it's a young child's job to test limits. As challenging as it may be, remind yourself that it is entirely normal for children to assert themselves in the form of food refusals, tantrums, and food-related rituals at just about the same time you nobly set out to introduce them to a wider range of foods and teach the social graces of eating.

And finally, consider that you have a lifetime's accumulation of your own individual, inherited, and even cultural beliefs regarding food. We highly recommend separating out those factors that make each bite or sip a far more weighty issue in your own mind than it otherwise needs to be.

Strategy #3: Never Let Them See You Sweat

We could just say, "Don't sweat it," but our years of experience tell us that unless you're far more calm, cool, and collected than we are as parents, you're going to sweat it out anyway. When it comes to feeding children, everyone inevitably feels some degree of pressure to perform. So in the spirit of reality, instead of telling you not to sweat it, we suggest perfecting your ability to hide it when you do. This is a practical strategy for parenting in general, but it will most definitely serve you well as you dish out what you know is best for your baby or child. This applies most often to those foods that children really want that they shouldn't have, or for things you really want them to eat but they want nothing to do with.

When it comes to babies, they may seem as if they aren't aware of how much of an emotional investment you may have riding on getting them to eat their rice cereal or drink out of a cup, but they really do sense stress and it can definitely wear off on them. The same holds true for toddlers and older children to an even greater degree. If they find

out just how much their consumption of a single brussels sprout means to you, or how much of an impact a tantrum can have on pushing back their bedtime in favor of a late-night snack, they're sure to try it. When they repeatedly test your limits, your job is to stick to your guns and reinforce the ground rules while maintaining your composure.

Strategy #4: Keep Food for Food's Sake

Keeping food for food's sake is an important peacekeeping strategy that, on its surface, seems relatively straightforward: Just teach children to eat when they're hungry, drink when they're thirsty, and refrain from doing so when they're not and you've got it made. Sound simple? You'd think it would be since we are all born with a natural drive to eat and drink only as much as our bodies need. Yet the fact of the matter is that by the time we reach adulthood, and often far sooner than that, these internal cues are overshadowed by external ones. Too many of us eat and drink for reasons that have very little to do with hunger or thirst, and unknowingly start teaching our children—even as early as in infancy—to do the same. It's pretty safe to say that the classic “freshman 15” pounds rumored to be gained by those entering college isn't just the result of increasing hunger and the availability of better food, that enjoying a movie really shouldn't require a bucket of popcorn, and that a lot of football fans would be a fair bit slimmer if they didn't associate *Monday Night Football* with burgers, beer, and a bag of chips. What we hope you'll also consider is that there's not much, if any, difference between these more obvious examples later in life and the tendency to routinely nurse babies to sleep, allow children to become reliant on bedtime bottles, or tempt toddlers with food as a reward for good behavior.

Whether you find yourself in the habit of offering your child food as comfort, convenience, or reward, realize that most, if not all, of these hard-to-break eating habits take root during early childhood—starting from the first day you offer your baby a breast or bottle. As soon as you start looking at it this way, you're sure to see everything from sippy cups to desserts in a new light.

Strategy #5: If at First You Don't Succeed...Try, Try Again

This is perhaps one of the easiest strategies to say, but one of the hardest to actually stick to. After all, it's not exactly human nature to experience repeated rejection and keep coming back for more. Yet most of your child's eating and drinking skills are developmentally dependent. As we've said before, the improvement of your child's daily eating activities should be considered learning experiences. The ability to keep one's baby food in one's mouth and actually swallow it, use a spoon without dumping one's food, drink from a cup without spilling, and sit still at the table for any measurable amount of time all take time to master.

We would like to suggest that you approach the skills required for eating and drinking the same as you would when teaching your child her ABCs. You don't wait until the day before kindergarten before you sing the alphabet to your child. In fact, some parents start singing it to their babies even before they start to coo, and only with time, repetition, encouragement, and many "failed" renditions do kids respond, imitate, separate the *lmnop*, and eventually put *a* and *b* together in any sort of meaningful way.

The other aspect of maintaining a positive, can-do attitude in the face of rejection has to do with the actual food itself. Knowing that it can take a dozen or more exposures to a new food before a child decides to accept it will make it a little bit easier for you to swallow the reality of the preceding 11 refusals. The goal here: teaching tolerance. The measure of your success is neither how many tries it takes, nor the number of foods your child is ultimately willing to eat, but the instillation of a willingness to take a bite and try it.

Strategy #6: Acknowledge Likes and Dislikes

Many a well-meaning parent has set out to teach food tolerance, only to be met with failure—even after employing every feeding strategy there is. The underlying and often overlooked problem: Just about nobody we know likes *everything*. We all have our distinct likes and dislikes, and children's attitudes toward food are no exception. We can also guarantee

you that your children won't share all your likes and dislikes, that some tastes are more likely to be acquired over time (think blue cheese, grapefruit, and onions, to name a few), and some things are simply never meant to be. For Laura, it's cooked carrots. For Jennifer, it's raw ones.

Strategy #7: Eat by Example

OK, so we've established the fact that everyone has their own likes and dislikes, and we've made the point that what starts in childhood stands a good chance of ending up an eating habit in adulthood. Now is as good a time as any to take a closer look at what *you* eat, when you eat it, where you eat it, and why. We're willing to bet that you have some habits that might not fare so well under nutritional scrutiny. In fact, a May 2011 study showed that parents exercise less and have poorer diets than those without children. You can decide for yourself not only if your pattern of eating is as healthy as you would like it to be, but also whether it is the example you want to set for your child because you can be sure he's watching you. While you're at it, be sure to also take a look at the eating habits of your children's other caregivers. It's a pretty safe bet that your children will be learning from watching and dining with them as well.

That said, it is going to be a very hard sell to get your child to eat things that you yourself won't eat, or to make healthy choices when he sees you (or his other adult caregivers) indulging in frequent visions of sugar plums all throughout the year. And if you aren't in the position to change your own pattern of eating, we suggest you make a concerted effort to keep your less-than-desirable indulgences, habits, and dislikes to yourself. Once the jury has been biased (as is the case with beets and brussels sprouts in the Jana household), it's far harder for scorned foods to gain their acceptance.

Strategy #8: Opt for Out of Sight, Out of Mind

No, out-of-sight tactics are not the most direct or enduring approach to teaching your child a sound eating style. But as a strategy for averting a battle, restricted access works wonders so long as your kids don't have money or a car at their disposal and we highly recommend it. Kids of

all ages are known to want what they see. At the same time, they are not very good at grasping the concept of delayed gratification, much less listening to reason if they can't have what they want.

If you don't want them to have it—whether it's a bedtime bottle or bubble gum—then don't set it where they can see it. You don't want your child begging for candy? Don't bring it into your home. You want to minimize the number of times you need to say no at the grocery store? Bypass the cookie aisle and choose your checkout lane wisely by avoiding the candy-laden ones. And by all means, minimize the amount of time your child spends watching television, since most of the unbelievably large number of ads children are exposed to are for all those foods and drinks they'd be better off not having.

Strategy #9: Make Fun of Food

Food-related issues will undoubtedly be a consideration in every day of your early parenting life. The topics, challenges, and approaches we've chosen to discuss when it comes to selecting, introducing, preparing, sharing, serving, and cleaning up foods are meant not only to help you anticipate and effectively avoid some of the many potential food fights that are known to lurk around every corner, but to help you actually have fun in the process.

As you sit down to arm yourself with nutritional knowledge and a strategic plan, we want to caution you against making food such serious business that you forget to enjoy the experience. Get your kids to help grow a garden, have them help you cook a meal, even name the end result after them (as in "Ryan's lasagna") and chances are good that (a) you all will have a whole lot more fun doing it and (b) by getting them to take ownership in the preparation, your kids will be more likely to eat whatever it is you've collectively prepared. When all is said and done, we hope you will have learned not to let the inevitable mealtime mishaps get you down, that you'll be better able to savor the moments both messy and neat and, in the end, that you will be empowered in your efforts to restore not only peas but harmony to your family table.